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Suzanne Baizerman  
*University of Minnesota*

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## TEXTILES AS PRIMARY SOURCES IN THE STUDY OF "BOUNDARY ART:" HISPANIC TEXTILES OF NORTHERN NEW MEXICO

SUZANNE BAIZERMAN

Department of Design, Housing and Apparel, University of Minnesota, 1985 Buford Ave., St. Paul, MN 55108

### INTRODUCTION

Wool, weft-faced textiles from the looms of Northern New Mexican Hispanic weavers (Figs. 1 through 7) are widely represented in museum collections and historical societies. Often, they are confused with Navajo and Mexican blankets and rugs although Hispanic weavings are the products of a unique weaving tradition and are produced within a distinctive cultural context. I view the history of Hispanic weaving in northern New Mexico as an example of "boundary art," that art which is produced by one cultural group for purchase by another. This transaction often requires the services of an intermediary and takes place within a "boundary art world."

Focus here is upon the craft of Hispanic weaving during three newly-designated periods. The first I have termed the "Transitional Period," 1860 to 1910. The second is the "Early Chimayó Period," 1880 to 1920, the last the "Revival Period," 1920-1940. These overlapping periods occur between what is termed the earlier Classic Rio Grande Style of Hispanic weaving and Modern Chimayó weaving found in northern New Mexico today. However, first a brief summary of what preceded these intermediate periods will be presented.

### CLASSIC RIO GRANDE WEAVING: PRE-1880

The first weaving technology in the American Southwest was a diffusion from Middle America to the settled peoples who were the predecessors of the modern Pueblo Indians during the centuries before contact with the white man. Later, after Spanish colonization the Navajo learned the art of weaving from the Pueblo.

The history of Hispanic weaving in the Southwest began in the late 16th century, when Hispanic settlers colonized the northernmost frontier of the Kingdom of New Spain in the area now known as New Mexico. These settlers brought European weaving technology to the area and constructed looms of local materials (as shown in Fig. 8 in a late 19th century example) to meet a range of textile needs. Blankets produced on Hispanic looms from earliest settlement until the late 19th century have been known as Rio Grande blankets. Early examples were made of coarse, homespun wool in solid natural colors or with simple stripes (Fig. 1). They were popular with all manner of frontiersmen - traders, trappers, miners - who were the first consumers in the "boundary art world."

In the 18th and early 19th century, as Mexico was establishing her independence from Spain, a new textile made its appearance, the famed Saltillo serape, produced in workshops in many parts of New Spain (Fig. 9). This unique serape appears to have been a synthesis of European, indigenous American influences and even those of Asia (via Manila Galleon trade). The intricately-patterned surfaces of these tapestries influenced the layout and design motifs in the Spanish-dominated New World from northern New Mexico to Guatemala. New Mexican interpretations of the Saltillo designs were on a much larger scale (Fig. 2): elements of the Saltillo serapes were used, but there were fewer of them and each was enlarged. There were both simple patterns and more complex ones. The Navajo, were likewise influenced by the Saltillo serapes. Further, Spanish interpretations influenced the Navajo and were influenced by the Navajo.



## THE TRANSITIONAL PERIOD IN HISPANIC WEAVING: 1860-1910

In 1848, New Mexico was annexed to the United States as part of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. While goods from the United States had trickled South of the Border before annexation, the volume drastically increased after that time and had a profound effect on the peoples of the territory and their craft traditions. By the 1860s the effects of territorial status within the U.S. were apparent. Inexpensive, commercially-made blankets were available; they cut into the demand for handmade blankets. For those who continued to handspin yarn, the quality of wool to which they had access declined due to the introduction of new breeds of sheep. The new type of wool changed the character of woven products. The handspun yarn from these new breeds of sheep as well as the new commercially-dyed and -spun yarns, often of fine quality, changed the scale and contours of design motifs. Just as the Navajo "eyedazzlers" were produced after the introduction of these new materials, Hispanic weavers produced their own form of eyedazzlers. The best known examples are what have come to be termed the "Trampas-Vallero-style" weavings, named in honor of two villages in northern New Mexico where they are thought to have originated (Fig.3).

In general, the Transition Period has been difficult to document because of the profusion of both old and new styles that were woven. Rural weavers continued to produce for home consumption. More expert weavers continued to weave, but for new markets: travelers and adventurers to the Southwest. These new markets created dramatic changes in the boundary art world.

## EARLY CHIMAYO STYLE WEAVING: 1880-1920

To capitalize on the market for souvenirs desired by travelers to the Southwest, a new industry designed to market curios emerged in the last decades of the 19th century. Curio dealers, such as the German-Jewish immigrant, Jake Gold (Fig. 10), and the Hispanic merchant, Jesus "Sito" Candelario (Fig. 11), were among the most colorful figures of their day. Their curio shops (Fig. 12) supplied travelers and scholars alike with everything from archaeological relics and Pueblo pottery to fossils, mounted spiders, gems and buffalo skins. Fortunately, the business records and personal correspondence of Candelario and to a lesser extent Gold were available for study (Baizerman, 1987). From these records I was able to partially reconstruct the history of early Chimayó weaving.

To satisfy increasing demand for "exotic goods" Jake Gold enlisted the help of rural Hispanic farmer/weavers, many of whom lived in or near the Hispanic village of Chimayó, to weave small pieces to his specifications. These products were sometimes advertised as "Chimayó Indian weavings," to capitalize on the consumers' interest in Native American goods. (In the lower left corner of Fig. 12 one can see some of the earliest textile examples of what has been called "tourist art.") Gold worked with the skills of the weavers. He modified familiar designs, simplifying them and adding large unpatterned areas to speed production. Candelario, capitalizing on his Hispanic heritage, expanded Gold's efforts to organize a pool of Hispanic cottage weavers. Candelario supplied yarn to weavers. His files virtually bulge with yarns samples and correspondence with yarn companies. In addition, Candelario used sophisticated marketing techniques to increase outlets for his curio products including weaving. He developed a mail-order catalog. He advertised his curios nationally in magazines and made good use of the new rail system to place goods in curio stores across the nation - in unlikely places like cigar stores and taxidermist's shops as well as curio stores. Candelario personally designed items such as blankets, pillow tops, and portiers for weavers to execute. While the majority of goods coming off of Hispanic looms during this period were small curio items, there were still some expert weavers producing fine, larger works resembling those of earlier periods (Fig. 4).



Fig. 1 Classic Rio Grande striped blanket, handspun yarn, ca. 1840. Courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art, catalog no. 2889.



Fig. 2 Classic Rio Grande-style weaving, pre-1860, handspun yarn, tapestry patterning. Courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art, catalog no. FA 67.16.1.

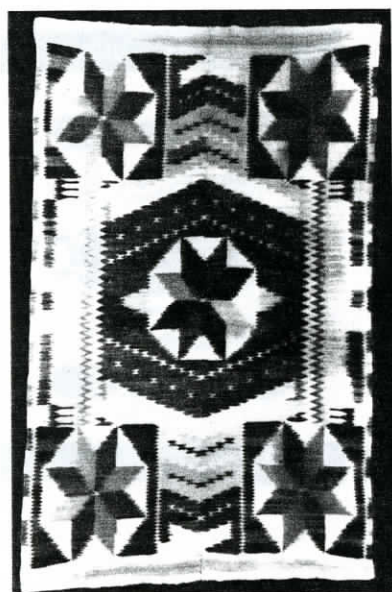


Fig. 3 Trampas-Vallero-style blanket, Transitional Period, ca.1880-1895, handspun and commercial yarns. Courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art, catalog no. A.8.56.3.

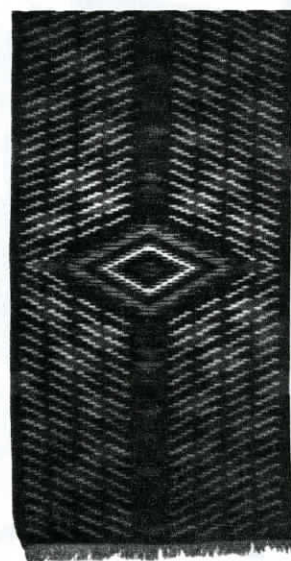


Fig. 4 Weaving of the Transitional Period woven in commercial yarns. The label of J. S. Candelario, curio dealer, is attached to lower right corner. Courtesy Mudd-Carr Gallery, Santa Fe.



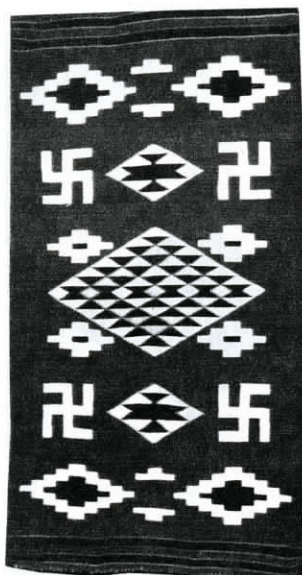


Fig. 5 Early Chimayó weaving with swastikas; commercial yarns. Courtesy of the School of American Research, catalog no. T 719.

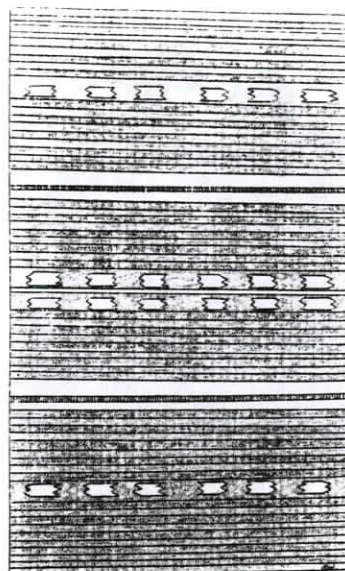


Fig. 6 Drawing of a Revival Period weaving. From the Weaving Bulletin published by the New Mexico State Department of Trades and Industries, 1937.

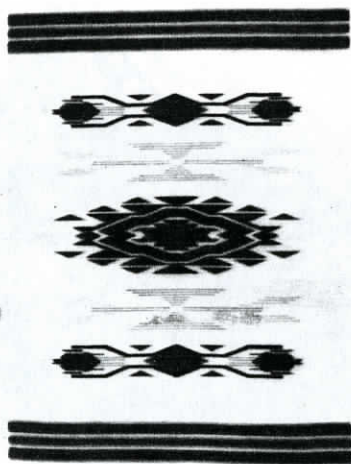


Fig. 7 Modern Chimayó-style weaving, courtesy of Arizona State Museum, University of Arizona, catalog no. C-17805



Fig. 8 Mr. and Mrs. Esquipulas Martinez, Chimayó, NM, with loom; ca. turn-of-the twentieth century. Courtesy Menaul Historical Library of the Southwest, Albuquerque.



Fig. 9 Saltillo-style serape, New Spain, ca. 1750. Courtesy of the American Museum of Natural History, catalog no 65/4207.



Fig.10 Photograph of Jake Gold with Native American woman, courtesy Museum of New Mexico, negative no. 9894.



Fig.11 Photograph of Jesus "Sito" Candelario. Courtesy Museum of New Mexico, negative no. 132690.

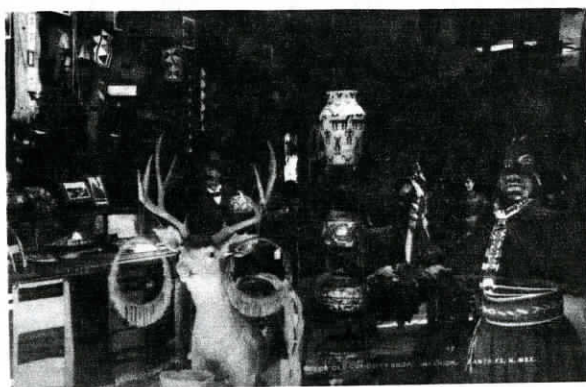


Fig.12 Photograph of Jake Gold in his store, ca. 1900. Lower left corner shows several Hispanic weavings. Courtesy Museum of New Mexico, negative no. 10729.