

Profile of Patricia L. Crown

Jennifer Viegas, *Science Writer*

For more than four decades, Patricia Crown, a professor of anthropology at the University of New Mexico, has conducted field investigations in the Ancestral Pueblo, Mogollon, and Hohokam areas of the American Southwest. Her work has revealed important aspects of these cultures concerning ceramics, trade, rituals, diet, gender roles, and more. Elected to the National Academy of Sciences in 2014, Crown five years earlier uncovered the first evidence of chocolate consumption in North America north of Mexico. Crown has also conducted an extensive analysis of organic residues from archaeological sites in the US Southwest and the Mexican Northwest, revealing widespread use of cacao and holly in communal, ritual gatherings dating from AD 750 to 1400.

Four Artists, One Archaeologist

Crown's father was an art professor at the University of Southern California, as well as a landscape painter. "He did most of his painting outside and often took his three children along," Crown says, adding that her mother, a public school teacher, was also an artist, as were her two older sisters. "I had no talent for painting," she says, "and so had to amuse myself in other ways."

One diversion was searching for artifacts during summer family camping trips to places in the American Southwest. It was during one such trip to New Mexico when 15-year-old Crown decided to become an archaeologist after years of being intrigued by landscapes and ruins. She says, "My parents both encouraged me to do whatever I was passionate about, and that was archaeology. So I read everything I could get my hands on and only applied to colleges that had good archaeology programs."

Defying Expectations

Crown chose the University of Pennsylvania for her undergraduate work, and earned her AB in anthropology with honors in 1974. She had planned to attend graduate school but was informed by an advisor that there was no reason for her to continue her studies because women in archaeology only worked in laboratories. Crown turned to a graduate student for advice, and she recommended that Crown go to the University of Arizona. She followed the suggestion and earned both her MA (1976) and PhD (1981) in anthropology there.

During her studies in Arizona, Crown attended a field school at Grasshopper Pueblo, where she was invited to become a teaching assistant and to do a dissertation project. For the project, she supervised the excavation of Chodistaas Pueblo, where ~200 ceramic vessels were unearthed. Interest in the artifacts led Crown to shift her dissertation topic from migration to ceramic variability within the households at the site (1). Archaeologist and National Academies of Science member Emil Haury (1904–1992) was Crown's primary mentor at the University of Arizona. She says, "He was not only an exceptional scholar, but also a highly ethical person who provided a role model for all of his students. Doc Haury particularly encouraged his students to write so that a farmer in Kansas could understand what we were talking about; I have tried to follow this advice."

Ceramics and Ideology

Before Crown finished her dissertation, she was hired as an assistant archaeologist at the Arizona State Museum, where she worked until 1985. She then became an assistant professor of anthropology at Southern Methodist University (1985–1990), which included running the university's field school in Taos, New Mexico. Crown next accepted a position as an assistant, and later associate, professor of anthropology at Arizona State University. In 1993, she became an associate professor at the University of New Mexico, where she has remained.

One year after moving to New Mexico, Crown authored the book *Ceramics and Ideology: Salado Polychrome Pottery* (2). In the book she describes her analysis of one of the most widely distributed types of 13th century pottery in the southwestern United



Portrait of Patricia Crown. Image courtesy of Wirt H. Wills (photographer).

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used to make chocolate drinks, and Yaupon holly.” She and her team believe that caffeinated drinks were important to pre-Hispanic individuals and were consumed largely in communal, ritual, and political contexts, where they functioned as social tools.

Ritual Closure in Pueblo Bonito

Crown’s present work involves studying a room in Pueblo Bonito that housed 66% of all known Chacoan cylinder jars. Originally excavated in 1896, the room was reexcavated by Crown’s team in 2013 with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities and National Geographic. Crown’s work suggests that

the room’s inhabitants practiced ritual closure through fire, probably around AD 1100.

While describing this project and others, Crown expresses her enduring fondness for the University of New Mexico, as well as for her chosen home state. She marvels that her primary research site is a short drive away from her house. She says, “Not only does New Mexico respect and honor its past, but it is an epicenter for creativity in both art and science, and has been for over 1,000 years. I’m also fortunate to practice archaeology at a time when advances in scientific techniques offer so many new ways to answer questions about the past.”

- 1 Crown PL (1981) Variability in Ceramic Manufacture at the Chodistaas Site, East-Central Arizona. PhD dissertation (University of Arizona, Tucson).
- 2 Crown PL (1994) *Ceramics and Ideology: Salado Polychrome Pottery* (Univ of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque).
- 3 Crown PL, ed (1998) *Women and Men in the Prehispanic Southwest: Gendered Perspectives on Labor, Power, and Prestige in the American Southwest* (School of American Research Press, Santa Fe, NM).
- 4 Crown PL (2000) Children in the prehistoric Puebloan Southwest. *Learning and Teaching in the Prehispanic American Southwest*, ed Kamp K (Univ of Utah Press, Salt Lake City), pp 108–124.
- 5 Crown PL (2007) Life histories of pots and potters: Situating the individual in archaeology. *Am Antiq* 72(4):677–690.
- 6 Crown PL, ed (2016) *The Pueblo Bonito Mounds of Chaco Canyon* (Univ of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque).
- 7 Crown PL, Hurst WJ (2009) Evidence of cacao use in the Prehispanic American Southwest. *Proc Natl Acad Sci USA* 106(7):2110–2113.
- 8 Crown PL, et al. (2012) Ritual black drink consumption at Cahokia. *Proc Natl Acad Sci USA* 109(35):13944–13949.
- 9 Crown PL, et al. (2015) Ritual drinks in the pre-Hispanic US Southwest and Mexican Northwest. *Proc Natl Acad Sci USA* 112(37): 11436–11442.