

***Wonders of the Weavers = Maravillas de los Tejedores: Nineteenth Century Río Grande Weavings from the Collection of the Albuquerque Museum.* Deborah C. Slaney. Albuquerque, NM: The Albuquerque Museum, 2005. 103 pp.\***

Reviewed by Cynthia J. Hale and Scott W. Hale

*Maravillas de los Tejedores (Wonders of the Weavers)* is the exhibition catalogue for a 19th century Río Grande textile exhibit of the same title from the collection of the Albuquerque Museum. In the introduction, James Moore, the museum's director, chronicles the development of the collection, and gratefully acknowledges the acquisitions obtained from Larry Frank, Ward Alan, and Shirley Minge. Though constructed for utilitarian purposes, Moore highlights the fine craftsmanship, aesthetic quality, and historic significance of these textiles, which were exhibited and published to commemorate the city of Albuquerque's third centennial.

The three essays in the catalogue by exhibition curator Deborah C. Slaney are arranged chronologically and each is introduced with a relevant epigraph. "Necessity and Natural Ingenuity" outlines the development of Río Grande weaving in Nuevo Mexico from the arrival of Hispanic weavers through Navajo and Pueblo influences to the end of the 19th century. Weaving materials and techniques are outlined with descriptions of the *telares* (looms), yarns, materials, and dyes vital to the construction and decoration of the textiles.

The second essay, "I Beg That You Will Be Pleased," details the family history of master weaver Ygnacio Ricardo Bazan and his brother Juan Bazan in Neuvo Mexico. The Bazan Brothers were influential in the popularization of Río Grande weavings, having contracted with the Mexican government to come to Northern New Mexico to introduce new weaving supplies, establish *obrajes* (family-based workshops), build looms, and to teach area residents to weave a variety of textiles such as *sabanillas*, *jergas*, *sarapes*, *frazadas*, and blankets in the multitude of weaves and knots necessary to construct them. They also taught the use of dyes they brought from Mexico and the local vegetal dyes for use with cotton, wool, and even silk.

In "From Rangeland to Railroad" readers learn the importance of the sheep trade and railroad economy in determining the size, shape, appearance, and feel of the weavings. The Transitional Period of Río Grande weaving (approximately 1860-1900) saw changes in technology, new materials, and even crossbreeding of sheep as new sources of wool affected the textiles and their styles. Always experimental and resourceful, weavers found access to Eastern carpeting and clothing, adapting products and utilizing new materials into their weavings. While difficulties with a fluctuating wool market, the overland trade, and the railroad may have brought changes to the New Mexican textile community, tourism brought travelers eager for cultural diversity and trip mementos of the Southwest. Curio dealers became textile merchants offering new innovations in designs like the Vallero Star and very brightly colored blankets from the village of El Valle. Some pictorial weavings appeared, and to the South, Chimayo's weavings displayed not only a profusion of forms but colored motifs. As a result, Río Grande weaving has flourished in the last century and Chimayo became home to some of the finest weavers in the world.

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Following the essays are 37 full-page color plates of textiles included in the exhibit, together with their didactics. Most are also punctuated by the remarks of either Lisa or Irvin Trujillo, both of whom are Rio Grande valley weavers. Their remarks are both insightful and give personal aesthetics to each textile. The reviewers were handicapped by having never seen the exhibit in situ, but the informative text and quality illustrations allow readers to examine the depth and variety of textiles in the collection, which represents most weaving styles made during the 19th century. The technical data on each weaving and dye and fiber analysis will be of particular interest to weaving experts, anthropologists, and museum staffs as well as interested laymen.

The catalogue's shortcomings are few but noticeable. Its arrangement can be initially disorienting. Moore's introduction would be more useful as the first piece of writing, rather than coming after a forward by the Trujillos that lacks their proper introduction. A glossary would also have been helpful, as many of the terms, particularly weaving types, present only a cursory reference on the first page of the text and are not referenced again until the individual plates. *Paladar* and *doble-ancha* are only referenced in the Plate Notes and will be unfamiliar terms to many readers. While a historical photograph of the horizontal loom utilized in the weavings does appear, only a cursory description of the loom is found with no explanation of the process. A diagram of the loom with parts identified would have been helpful. Dyes are enumerated and their importation or acquisition discussed, but no mention is made of the dying process, one of the more fascinating elements of the weaving process that one can witness in Northern New Mexico.

Deborah C. Slaney has prepared a handsome companion catalogue to the exhibit and it serves as a fitting tribute to Albuquerque on its 300th birthday. To celebrate the event with an exhibit that illustrates the cultural diversity and historic importance of the enduring weaving tradition is apropos. *Wonders of the Weavers* will assist readers in the discovery of these *maravillas* for years to come and bring deserved recognition to the Albuquerque Museum's outstanding collection of textiles and the museum's efforts to collect, conserve, and interpret the region's rich weaving tradition.

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