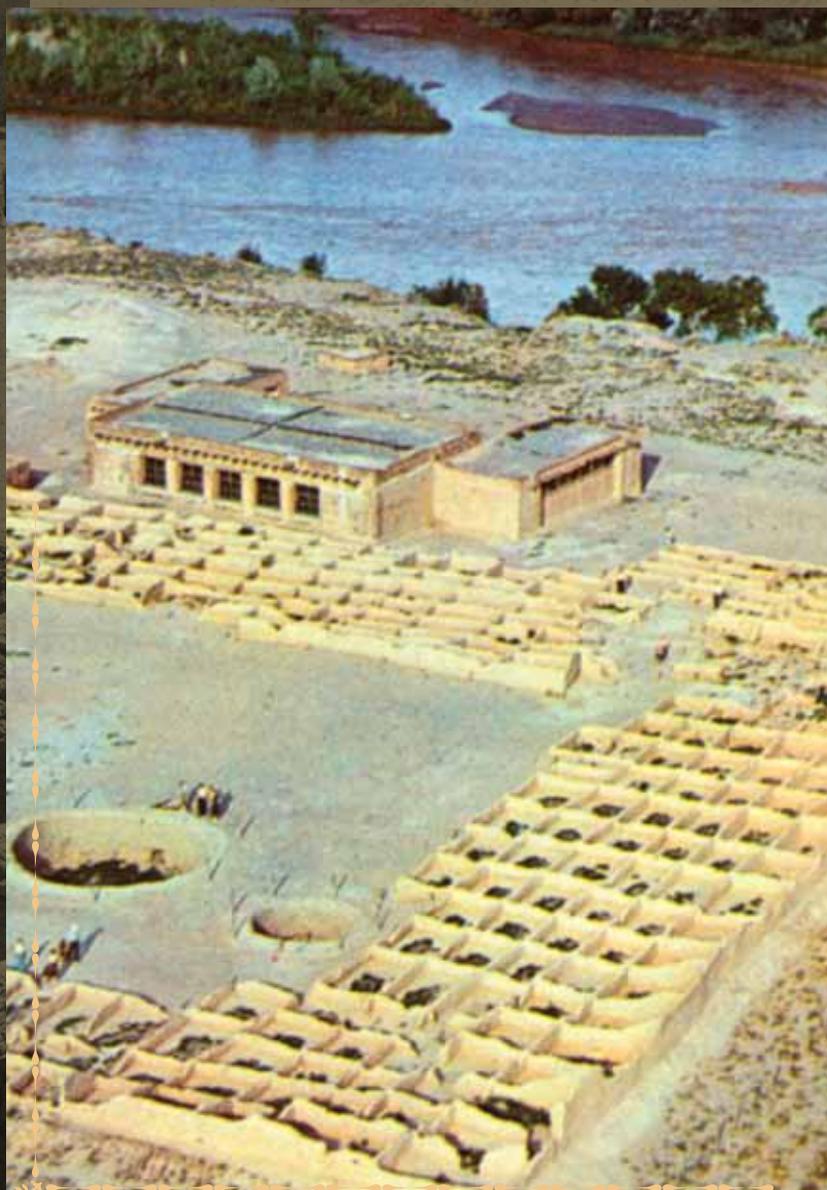


Poem

# It Used to be a Village

by Carlos Contreras



It used to be a village  
one of many  
three plazas.

Connected at the limbs  
and to life, by a river running  
some twenty-thousand mouths toward  
food  
and sustainability.

Tiwa,  
Tongue of the native,  
Tongue of the unfamiliar,  
Depending on the perspective.  
And over time perspectives change—  
some things stay the same,  
preserved, for sake of telling stories.

Stories like the land, food for thought in  
the way they bear:

Fear  
Curiosity  
Love  
Communion  
Community  
Conquest

All words of different tongues,  
from two worlds  
that collided.

The color photograph by Kent Dick comes from a 1950s postcard, courtesy Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), Neg. No. 089563.

Struck.

Gold,  
No—  
Food, yes.  
Maybe not quite the Seven Cities searched for  
but found nonetheless.

It used to be a village  
played host to  
First contact  
First conversation  
First questioning of cultures, and maybe

the only answers lay somewhere in the wind,  
dust,  
in the puddles that build a city made of mud  
held together with twine

Yucca  
and  
Turkey feathers  
then,  
Retablos  
Wagon Wheels  
Ox Shoes  
Baskets and  
Blankets —

Three sisters and a dream.

Twenty villages and some sky,  
some five hundred years ago, more resilient than  
we could possibly imagine, right now.

A cyclical existence  
one that begins and ends  
with Earth.

Ceremonial birth  
of a people baked to match the  
color of the dust they came from  
turned to,  
whispered in the wind  
a time-line of what we think happened  
because we only know so much.  
So we preserve that which we do,  
Curators of culture,  
Coronado to Tiwa to today  
telling stories of  
Two thousand meeting twenty,  
Thousand.

Conflict  
Compromise  
Hunger  
and  
Survival  
When there wasn't enough to go around  
and no desire to go, hungry.

From throats, to mouths, communication  
Compromise  
Change,  
Some things stayed the same—  
because either way,  
The Earth remains, shifted, but still in the same place.

Coronado  
Bernallilo  
New Mexico  
Tiguex  
Tiwa

It used to be a village,  
If you listen, the wind will tell you it still is.

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*Carlos Contreras discusses composing this  
poem at [elpalacio.org](http://elpalacio.org).*

The black-and-white photograph shows replicas of the Kuaua Ruins, at Coronado State Monument, near Bernalillo, New Mexico. The original ruins were excavated from 1933-1938, and then backfilled for preservation. In the late 1930's these replica ruins were constructed. Most of the replicas have since eroded away. Unidentified photographer [possibly George Thompson], New Mexico Magazine Collection, ca. 1950. Courtesy Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), Neg. No. HP 2007.20.185.