



Description

The [Navajos](#) began weaving with wool during the 17th century, when sheep were introduced to the New Mexico-Arizona region by the Spanish. Navajo women soon came to be regarded as the premier weavers in this region.

The elaborate designs in this blanket are inspired by those of [Saltillo](#)-style textiles. Navajo weavers began experimenting with Saltillo designs in the second half of the 19th century. Before then, most Navajo blankets displayed designs of narrow stripes or bands.

Navajos

American Indians today living in northwestern New Mexico and northeastern Arizona. Their name for themselves is Diné.

Maker

We do not know who wove this blanket but we can assume that the weaver was a Navajo woman. In contrast to neighboring Pueblo societies, where men traditionally were the principal weavers, most Navajo weavers were and continue to be women.

This blanket belonged to Ganado Mucho, pictured here during a visit to Washington, D.C., in 1874. Ganado Mucho was an important Navajo leader during much of the 19th century.



His name means "Livestock Many" in Spanish, reflecting the large herds he owned. In the late 19th century, Ganado Mucho befriended the famous trader Juan Lorenzo Hubbell who operated a trading post near Ganado Mucho's home in northeastern Arizona. Hubbell encouraged Navajo weavers near his trading post to develop a distinctive weaving style, known today as "Ganado."

Top: Ganado Mucho, Navajo, 1874, Washington, D.C. Photographer: C.M. Bell. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, neg. no. 2388

Design

Navajo weavers created their own designs and also reworked designs produced by weavers in other cultures. Both Navajo blankets shown here were inspired by [Saltillo](#)-style textiles, but with different results.

In the blanket to the left, the weaver has taken the diamond design that often forms the central motif of Saltillo-style weavings and broken it up into serrated half-diamonds and [parallelograms](#) arranged in bands across the blanket. In the blanket to the right, rows of complete serrated diamonds provide the frame for single design elements—zigzags, crosses, and diamonds—which may predate the arrival of the Spanish in the North American Southwest.

Saltillo Style

a weaving style characterized by a rectangular shape with borders that frame a central motif (most often a serrated diamond) and a patterned background. It is thought to have originated around AD 1600 near Saltillo, the modern capital of the northern Mexican state of Coahuila.

Production

This blanket was woven around 1900, at the time when commercial wool yarns colored with synthetic dyes were first becoming available to the Navajos. It combines these yarns with handspun wool yarn, in both natural white and colored blue and pale yellow with plant dyes. The blanket was woven on a [vertical loom](#) similar to the one shown in this exhibit currently at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History. The exhibit was first displayed as part of the Smithsonian's component of the World Columbian Exposition, an early World's Fair held in Chicago in 1893.

Vertical loom

a loom on which the warp yarns run at a right angle to the ground.

Use

Navajos and many other Indian people used blankets not only on their beds, but as outer garments, as seen here in a photograph of a Navajo delegation to Washington, D.C., taken in 1874. The owner of the blanket shown here, Ganado Mucho, stands in the back row, second from the left.



Navajo delegation, 1874, Washington, D.C. Photographer: C.M. Bell. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, neg. no. 2410-C