Preservation Archaeology at the Dinwiddie Site: Research Update for 2014

KAREN SCHOLLMEYER

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In the summer of 2014, Archaeology Southwest completed a second field season of excavations at the Dinwiddie site (LA 106003) near Cliff, New Mexico. The Archaeology Southwest–University of Arizona Preservation Archaeology Field School included eleven undergraduates and three graduate students from twelve different universities, along with six staff members who work in academic and professional archaeology. As we prepare a detailed report of our findings, we offer this brief update on some of the highlights of this year's research.

The Dinwiddie site is an adobe village of about 100 rooms inhabited from about A.D. 1300–1450. People lived at this important site during a time of great change in the Southwest. Centuries earlier, people in this region resided in large villages that were part of a tradition archaeologists call Classic Mimbres, after the Mimbres River. Around 1130, farmers left those villages, and populations remained small and scattered for the next 150–200 years. By the 1300s, large villages formed once again, as farmers from various cultural backgrounds—including some groups from as far away as northeastern Arizona—moved into the area and established new communities, or joined existing

A view of the Dinwiddie site in 2014.

ones. Archaeologists working in New Mexico call this period the Cliff phase, after the town of Cliff, which was the center of a densely settled area in the 1300s.

Cliff phase villagers participated in what archaeologists identify as the Salado ideology—a system of shared beliefs and traditions possibly akin to a religion. People expressed Salado ideas on decorated pottery and on other objects, all with strong links to the Ancestral Pueblo area to the north. Based on evidence from the Cliff area and from Salado sites across the Southwest, archaeologists think that the Salado ideology functioned, in part, as a social "glue," uniting groups with different geographic and cultural origins. The relatively rapid formation of Cliff phase villages in the 1300s after a period of low population meant that bringing disparate newcomers together into a community might have been challenging at times. Salado ideology provided one solution to that challenge.

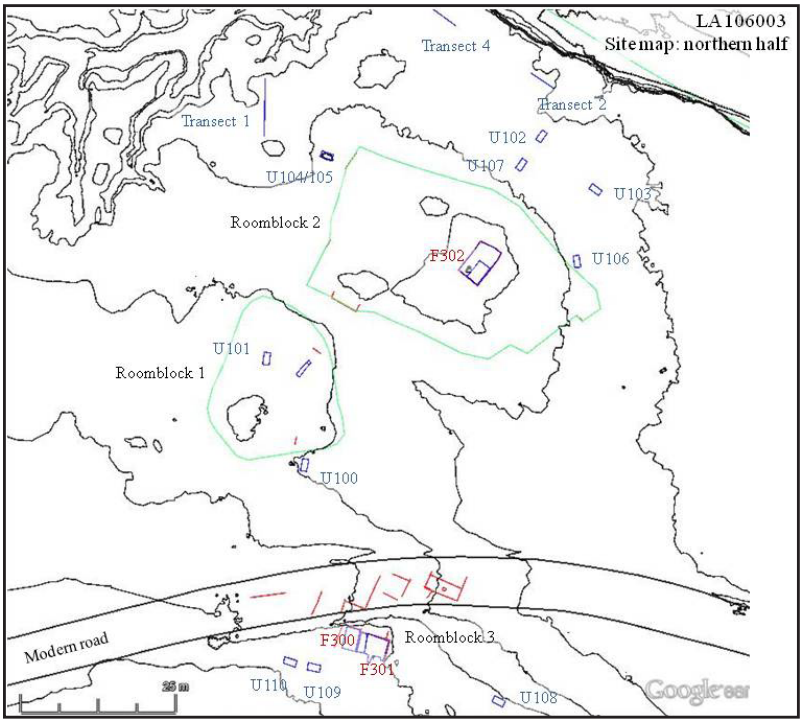
Important aspects of this ideology originated with specific Ancestral Pueblo groups who had left northeastern Arizona in the late 1200s. Archaeologists call these groups the Kayenta. In Mule Creek, pottery shows that a group of Kayenta people joined an existing village at the 3-Up site. At the Dinwiddie site, our initial observations on the site surface suggested that the same thing might have happened there. Excavations in 2013 and 2014 have revealed a different—and very interesting—picture.

New Discoveries at the Dinwiddie Site

At the Dinwiddie site, we see evidence of Salado ideas and cultural influences linked to the Kayenta, but no convincing evidence—so far—that a large group of people migrated directly from the Kayenta area. Distinctive items mark the presence of Kayenta immigrants: the perforated plates Kayenta potters used as base molds; certain kinds of painted pottery, especially a group of related

A perforated plate (above) and a Maverick Mountain bowl from southern Arizona (right). We found very few sherds of these types at Dinwiddie.

types archaeologists call the Maverick Mountain Series; and architectural features, including a specific style of hearth or fire pit. When archaeologists find those markers at a site, we can surmise that Kayenta immigrants lived there. When we do not find those markers at a site, but it has other indications of Salado, we can infer that the inhabitants were somehow participating in the Salado belief system, but were not themselves Kayenta immigrants. In 2013, we hoped to discern whether these specific markers were present at Dinwiddie by excavating outdoor trash deposits. The trash deposits were thin, however, and we weren't sure how to interpret the small amount of Kayenta-style pottery we found.



Map of roomblocks and excavated areas at the Dinwiddie Site.

In 2014, we excavated portions of three intact adobe rooms in order to increase our sample of trash from different parts of the site, and in order to examine attributes of architecture that Jack and Vera Mills did not record in detail during their work at the site in the 1960s. We excavated in two rooms just south of the modern Christian Center Road (Roomblock 3) and in one room in the northern area of the site adjacent to the earlier excavations (Roomblock 2). We placed an additional excavation unit on the hilltop at the southern end of the site.

One interesting result of this year's work is the sparse evidence for Kayenta immigrants. We found only small amounts of Maverick Mountain pottery and two sherds of a perforated plate, and we did not find any distinctively Kayenta architectural features. Although a few people living at Dinwiddie may have come from the Kayenta area, most residents did not. Instead, Dinwiddie's villagers came from other traditions and used Salado beliefs and ways of doing things to forge a community identity for themselves.

Another unexpected finding was the extent of remodeling visible in Roomblock 3. We expected two-story architecture here because the deposits we could see in the road cut were so deep. As it turns out, most of this height came from ancient remodeling efforts, as people knocked down older walls and rooms to build reconfigured rooms on top of them. We could also see layers of thick floor plaster where people had repaired worn or sloping floors, and poles and plaster added to walls where residents had reinforced weak spots. Until now, some archaeologists thought that many Cliff phase villages were relatively short-lived places where farmers settled for a few years before moving on.

Clearly, the Dinwiddie site was inhabited for a long time, and residents invested time and labor in repairing worn structures and remodeling buildings to serve their changing needs.

We can see another intriguing hint of long-term residence in the village through the pottery types we found in different rooms. Roomblock 2 had a much higher proportion of El Paso Polychrome, a type linked to southwest Texas and northern Mexico, than did the rooms near the road. Does this mean that residents lived in the two areas at slightly different times during the 1300s, or that people with different geographic or cultural origins lived in the two areas? Or some combination of both explanations?

Future Research Directions

Our final 2015 field season at Dinwiddie will allow us to explore the differences between the three visible areas of architecture. Sampling additional rooms in Roomblock 2 will enable us to examine whether the differences in pottery between this area and Roomblock 3 we noticed in 2014 are consistent, and whether architecture (including details of wall and door construction and remodeling) differs between the two roomblocks. This may include re-excavating some of the more interesting rooms the Millses uncovered, in order to record details about construction that weren't considered important 50 years ago but are of known value today. We also plan to sample the third cluster of rooms, Roomblock 1, to obtain similar ceramic and architectural data for comparison with the other two roomblocks.

This new information will help us examine whether differences between roomblocks exist because people lived in them at slightly different times during the Cliff phase, or whether the residents of these three parts of the site had different backgrounds or came from different social groups. Either answer will give us new insights into how people in the Cliff area used Salado ideology to build a sense of community within a village, and to link their villages to a larger network of social and economic relationships across the southern Southwest.

Mapping roof support post holes in one of several layers of floor plaster in a prehistoric room.

Important artifacts found at the Dinwiddie site

This perforated plate sherd (and a second one like it) from the Dinwiddie site are marks of Kayenta influence from northeastern Arizona.

We found only 13 sherds (less than 3% of the painted pottery) of Maverick Mountain polychrome, another type that marks Kayenta influence.

A Dinwiddie Polycrome sherd from our 2014 excavations (above left) and a whole vessel from the Mills Collection at Eastern Arizona College (above right). Named after the Dinwiddie site, this type of pottery has been found only in the Upper Gila area.

An El Paso Polychrome sherd, a type used heavily in northern Mexico and west Texas. We did not find any whole pots in the trash deposits at Dinwiddie, but examining the proportions of different types of broken sherds tells us much more about the site's social ties to different parts of the Southwest.

A stone axe head from Dinwiddie. A groove for hafting into a wooden handle extends ¾ of the way around this axe head, a trait linked to the Hohokam area to the south. Full-grooved axes (with grooves for hafting extending all the way around the axe head) are associated with the Ancestral Pueblo area to the north. This is the only axe head from our work here so far, although the Millses reported finding 23 in the late 1960s; 75% of those were ¾ grooved, and the rest were full-grooved, showing a mix of northern and southern cultural influences.

A ground stone from Dinwiddie with a dark circular stain marking its use as a cooking surface or griddle. This is the only such item we have found so far. The Millses found three of these stones, which they called "comales."

Projectile points from the Dinwiddie site are mostly unnotched triangular and small side-notched arrow points made from obsidian, chalcedony, and chert. These styles are typical of the Cliff phase in southwestern New Mexico. An exception is the obsidian point (broken prehistorically) labeled FN 730, made in a style called Gypsum from the Middle Archaic period (3500-2100 B.C.). A resident of the Dinwiddie site probably found this point on a much earlier site and took it home.

A mano used for grinding corn and other foods. All the manos found in 2014 were plain on the edges like this one, but the Millses found 17 with grooves on their sides for the user's fingers. Manos with finger-grooves are associated with northern Ancestral Pueblo influence, another sign of the mixture of cultural backgrounds the people who lived here came from.