

ASPECTS OF THE VIRGIN ANASAZI TRADITION IN GRAND CANYON

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When viewed from Grand Canyon on the southern boundary of the Virgin Tradition, there appear to have been slight differences between them and those of the Kayenta Tradition between A.D. 1100 and 1150. While architectural differences are notable, ceramic variations are not always easy to discern. This paper suggests that sites of the Virgin Tradition are not generally found east of Kanab Canyon, but attempts to establish fixed boundaries are not intellectually productive.

With well over 2000 prehistoric sites now recorded in Grand Canyon National Park and its immediate environs, we should now be in a position not only to make some statements about the environmental effects of that great gorge upon human use, but also about the identity and other cultural aspects of the prehistoric people who lived there.

This culture history involved the Archaic split-twig figurine complex and some rare Archaic pictographs in western Grand Canyon; the Cohonina; Cerbat; Kayenta and Virgin Anasazi; and the proto-historic Southern Paiute, Havasupai and Hualapai (the Pai), and Hopi. My purpose here is to present some of my thoughts about one of those traditions, the Virgin Anasazi in Grand Canyon.

The reality of this tradition, not to mention its diagnostic characteristics, has been subject to a lack of consensus over many years. Some of this has been occasioned by gaps in our research coverage but also by some with superficial field experience often resulting in dogmatic views by a few who have voiced opinions either in print or at meetings.

This is not the place to discuss all the past pros and cons of the validity of the Virgin Tradition (see for example F. Lister 1964; Jennings 1966; Gumerman and Dean 1989). As Altschul and Fairley (1989:77) have noted in a recent synthesis of Arizona Strip archaeology, "This issue continues to be a subject of controversy."

Suffice it to say, I believe that there are slight differences between the Virgin and Kayenta traditions. I use that latter term—"traditions"—because it seems less formal and better fits with the data than the term "branches" which commonly has been used in connection with subdivisions of the Anasazi. These variances, however slight, nevertheless should be taken into consideration in this discussion.

The distinctions appear to be most clear in the areas of ceramics and architecture. Parenthetically, I agree with Aikens (1966:5) who noted that there had been too much emphasis on ceramics in considering Virgin-Kayenta questions. However, that's exactly where some of the differences appear.

For the purposes of this paper, I'll restrict my remarks to the period between A.D. 1000 and 1150, mostly Pueblo II. There are not many earlier or later sites in Grand Canyon affiliated with the Anasazi.

Some archaeologists who have worked in Grand Canyon believe that Kayenta Anasazi occupation there lasted into the early 1200s but I have always maintained that the general exodus was earlier, about A.D. 1150. The reason for this differing opinion has to do with the presence of Flagstaff Black-on-white which some believe dates after A.D. 1150 (Dean 1981). However, in Grand Canyon, Flagstaff B/W is common on Kayenta sites in association with Black Mesa (ca. 900-1100), Sosi (1070-1150), and Dogoszhi (1070-1150) black-on-whites that did not extend beyond A.D. 1150. Furthermore, the later Tsegi Orange Ware polychromes are extremely rare in Grand Canyon sites. There are, however, several ^{14}C dates from sites in and around Grand Canyon that extend into the 1200s (Brown 1982:75; Schwartz et al. 1980; Jones 1986; Westfall 1987) if indeed these dates are at all accurate.

Architectural differences seem to be present in the late PII period. Masonry pueblos of the Virgin Tradition often have a different configuration from those in the Kayenta area. Ten or 15 room Virgin structures with a C-, U-, L-, or E-shape sometimes with windbreak walls filling the open ends are not uncommon. The presence of true kivas is problematical.

In the sphere of ceramics, Virgin series of Tusayan Gray Ware with North Creek Gray and North Creek Black-on-gray predominate on PII Virgin sites. Many analysts have difficulty distinguishing the undecorated gray types from Kayenta gray pottery. But, as Geib and his colleagues (1990:70) noted from sites on the Kanab Plateau, in some specimens of Virgin Series graywares, "the paste appears spongy, frothy, or subvitrified," not seen in the Kayenta series. In my own examination of North Creek sherds from the Arizona Strip, the paste surrounding the temper appears to be "platy"—that is, there are small horizontal voids in the clay when the sherd is viewed in cross section; this does not appear in Kayenta series graywares.

Shinarump Gray Ware, referring to sherds "with a dark slate gray or purplish cast, abundant sand or crushed fine-grained sandstone temper (which may appear as fine white angular fragments to the naked eye), and a characteristically vitrified paste" (Geib et al., 1990:71), has often been included in the Virgin Tradition. One center of its manufacture apparently was a few miles east of Kanab, Utah. It may have been made with clays with a manganese content thus giving it a purplish cast; there was at one time a small manganese mine near the Vermilion Cliffs in the Chinle formation (Westfall 1985:96). This pottery is fairly common in the eastern Grand Canyon, especially on the North Rim in association with Kayenta ceramics and I have thought it to be associated there with that tradition rather than Virgin. Parenthetically, at those Vermilion Cliffs sites, which are earlier, 77.9% of the sherds were typed as Shinarump while the analyst recorded only 20.8% as "Virgin-Kayenta" (Wilson 1985:117-118). Douglas McFadden (personal communication, August 5, 1993), who knows the archaeology of the area east of Kanab well, has noted that Shinarump ceramics are associated with Virgin Tradition traits; after A.D. 1050, according to McFadden, Kayenta traits suddenly were introduced there.

It may be that, in attempting to draw boundaries between Virgin and Kayenta, archaeologists have not duly considered the chronology of the areas and of the sites being analyzed.

Walhalla Gray Ware and Walhalla White Ware, originally described by Marshall (1979:97-104), ceramics attributed to the Virgin Tradition by Schwartz, Marshall, and Kepp (1979:83), are, in my opinion, not valid wares. They are virtually indistinguishable from Tusayan Gray and White wares, the only noticeable difference being a reddish patina on some of the quartz sand temper.

We really don't need to discuss in any detail Moapa Gray Ware with its olivine temper. This Virgin Tradition ware occurs in western Grand Canyon on Virgin sites and is occasionally found as trade on the western south rim of the Canyon on Cohonina sites.

For the present, little can be said about the socio-political or economic organization of Virgin Tradition sites in Grand Canyon proper. Few such sites have been recorded and almost none excavated. These appear to have been seasonally occupied each by an extended family or two and the inhabitants were primarily involved in the procurement of wild foods, both plant and animal. Trade seems to have been carried on only in a superficial fashion with the Cohonina on the south side of the Canyon. Unlike efforts to reconstruct socio-political and

economic patterns in the Lost City area of southern Nevada (Rafferty 1989, 1990; Lyneis 1992), Virgin evidence in Grand Canyon does not provide sufficient data nor a basis for comparison with those other Virgin areas.

With these characteristics in mind, what can we say about the geographic distribution of the Virgin Tradition? To give but one example, Westfall and Davis (1986:8-9), in a proposal relating to the Arizona Strip, identified the maximum extent of the "Virgin Branch of the Kayenta Anasazi" as "north to the Zion Park uplands, east toward the Kaiparowits Plateau in Utah, south to the Colorado River in Arizona, and west-southwest along the Muddy River in Nevada."

Examination of sherd collections as well as field work, leads me to believe that in the Grand Canyon vicinity, Virgin Tradition sites are generally not east of Kanab Canyon; certainly sites on the North Rim of Grand Canyon, including the Walhalla Plateau, were affiliated with the Kayenta. Along the Colorado River through Grand Canyon, Virgin sites do not appear until just below Kanab Creek (Fairley et al. 1991:68ff).

The analyses of surveys conducted on the Paria Plateau (Mueller et al. 1968:49) are somewhat ambivalent in terms of ceramics. While biased toward decorated types, most of the gray wares were considered in the Virgin series, while most of the white wares were included in the Kayenta series.

At the Gnatmare Site (a most descriptive name and one with which I am intimately familiar after seven field seasons on Black Mesa in northern Arizona) north of the Paria, Metcalfe (1980:53) "placed the ceramic material . . . within the cultural affiliation of the Kayenta Branch" and felt "that the Virgin-Kayenta ceramic distinctions are not significant" Aikens (1965:7) reported Bonanza Dune, in Johnson Canyon, as a Virgin ruin. Perhaps there was some intermingling of the Kayenta and Virgin peoples in these areas east of Kanab or perhaps the occupations occurred at different times.

Certainly by now it should be clear that any attempt to rigidly draw fixed boundaries between the Kayenta and Virgin Anasazi is an exercise in futility and in reality not intellectually productive. As David Madsen (1989:24) cogently noted in addressing classifications of the prehistoric Fremont of the Great Basin:

. . . we cannot always expect to define clearly recognizable sets of traits that identify prehistoric 'cultures,' and that the problems Fremont archaeologists have had over the last half-century is trying to define the limits of the Fremont culture and its variants, may not be due to poor excavation techniques or to insufficient amounts of data, but to the fact that such limits do not exist.

Recent attention to Virgin Tradition archaeology is most encouraging as is the publication of results of this attention by governmental agencies as well as by private archaeological firms. Since this symposium is being held in honor of Rick Thompson, whom I am pleased to say I have known and admired for more than 30 years, I should like to note the importance of his *Western Anasazi Reports* and I hope ways and means can be found to continue that series.

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