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## PVN OP 025 Excavation Report

Edward M. Schortman  
*Kenyon College*

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## Operation 25

Operation 25 encompasses four monumental platforms, Strs. 1A-12, 13, 14, and 15. All told, Op. 25 covers ca. 2,100m<sup>2</sup> in the western portion of the La Sierra site core. Together, these edifices define the north, west, and south sides of a plaza that measures 20x30m; the east flank is bounded by Strs. 1A-16 and 1A-17 (Op. 37). Portions of Strs. 1A-13, 14, and 15 were dug over the course of the 1988 and 1995 field seasons, exposing approximately 170m<sup>2</sup> of prehistoric deposits.

### Structure 1A-12

Structure 1A-12, the smallest of the platforms defining the plaza in La Sierra's western site core (Strs. 1A-12/17), is 5.7m north of Str. 1A-13 and its northeast corner intersects Str. 1A-15 on the east. The land on which Str. 1A-12-1st was raised was relatively level, unlike the situations noted for Strs. 1A-13 and 1A-14. Looting at Str. 1A-12-1st had seriously damaged most of the summit and the edifice's northeast corner. Digging here, conducted as parts of Subop. 25AB, AF, AG, AI, AJ, and AK, cleared of ca. 25m<sup>2</sup>. Excavations were pursued to maximum depths of 1.4m and 0.96m below modern ground surface outside and within architecture, respectively, revealing one major period of construction. All work on and around Str. 1A-12 was carried out from April 4-May 16, 1995 under the direction of D. Contreras.

### Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	Str. 1A-12-1st	U.1-27	-	-	LCL II/III
2	Str. 1A-12-1st	-	S.3	F.1	LCL III/II
3	-	-	S.1, 2	F.2, 3	

### Time Span 1

All of the exposed architecture was seemingly in use at this time though it is unclear whether it was raised simultaneously. Three, four, and five stone-faced terraces ascend Str. 1A-12-1st's west (U.15-17), south (U.1-3, 6), and east flanks (U.20-24). On the south, the basal terrace (U.1) is fashioned of cobbles and rises 0.16m above a white plaster floor (U.25). That surface is at least 0.02m thick and extends 2.52m to the south where it ends in an eroded, irregular edge. The U.1 stone tread is surfaced with unmodified stones and is 0.6m wide. Rising above it on the south is U.2, a ca. 0.4m-high terrace facing constructed largely out of cut blocks set in four clear courses. Unit 2 is approximately 0.25m wide and gives way to a 0.28m-high riser (U.3) built in a very similar fashion to its predecessor except that U.3 seems to have been capped with a course of schist slabs. The 0.25m between U.2 and 3 was covered with a white plaster that lapped up onto the base of U.3. Unit 3's tread, in turn, measures 1.2m across north-south and is surfaced with earth and stone. Unit 6, the fourth ascending terrace, stands a

preserved 0.42m above the U.3 terrace tread. Made almost exclusively from cut stone blocks, this riser was apparently covered with a white plaster portions of which still adhered to its surface.

Two stone constructions (U.4 and 5) were built against the south (outside) face of U.2 and seemingly rest on the stone paved U.1 tread. Unit 4, the most thoroughly exposed of the pair, is 0.55m wide east-west, projects 0.25m south of the U.2 riser and stands 0.55m high. Unit 5 is 0.6m to the east, extends 0.25m south from U.2, stands a preserved 0.32m tall, and is at least 0.3m wide (its eastern margin was not revealed). Both U.4 and 5 are fashioned using a mixture of roughly shaped blocks and cobbles. The architectural significance of these units is unclear; they may be buttresses, devices intended to channel traffic up Str. 1A-12-1st's south side, or they might define the sides of a niche open to the south. Passing between U.4 and 5 leads directly to U.9, a 0.45x0.45m stone block that projects south from U.6's riser and is approximately 0.4m tall. Once again, the import of this projection is unknown. It does divide the U.3 terrace into at least two spaces, one measuring 1.2x2.2m to the west and the other covering 1.2x4.9m to the east (the latter figure is predicated on the absence of other space-dividers in unexcavated portions of the U.3 terrace east of U.9).

The building's western face is mounted by three terraces standing 0.21-0.55m high and measuring 0.45-0.5m across (U.15-17). The risers are fashioned mostly from cut blocks intermixed with schist slabs and cobbles; fragments of a white plaster were recorded adhering to the face of the second ascending terrace (U.16). Some plaster was also found covering the tread linking the basal western terrace facing (U.15) with U.16. Set into U.16's west face were two square holes. One, in the basal course is 0.36m north of U.16's southwest corner with U.3 and measures 0.26m high by 0.14m and 0.19m wide at its base and top, respectively. The second is 0.11m to the south and 0.18m above the former indentation but has been heavily damaged as the wall collapsed. These holes seem to be intentional and may be sockets for tenoned sculpture.

Structure 1A-12-1st's northwest corner (U.18) is inset, stepping in 0.3m to the east, 0.6m south of its northern intersection with U.19, the northern basal wall. Units 18 and 19 are not well-preserved but are made almost exclusively of cut blocks; they stand 0.21-0.4m high. A white plaster floor (U.26) runs under U.18 and 19 where it shows evidence of at least three episodes of resurfacing. The full extent of this floor was not determined.

Structure 1A-12-1st's east face is ascended by five terraces that are 0.1-0.8m high and 0.46-1.55m wide. All are made primarily of cut blocks intermixed with some large cobbles and schist slabs. The basal riser (U.20), one of the shortest in the sequence, was revealed to be 0.12m high by 0.57m across. Unit 20, in turn, is succeeded on the west by one of the tallest terraces (U.21, 0.8m high). Preservation above this point is variable, the exposed portions of these terraces being on the southern margins of the large looter's hole in the platform's northeast corner. Nevertheless, the next ascending terrace, U.22, is clearly one of the largest elements in the terrace sequence. It rises 0.8m above U.21 and measures 1.55m wide, of which all but 0.1m consists of the U.22 wall itself. Units 23 and 24 rise a reconstructed 0.1m and 0.44m, respectively, the latter giving way to the summit on the west; U.23 is 0.46m wide. The fill underlying U.23 and 24 consists of densely packed medium to large cobbles set in a coarse-textured, dark brown soil (U.27). This is the only place where Str. 1A-12-1st's fill was exposed.

The southeast platform corner, where U.3 and 21 intersect, is inset 0.3m, that indentation extending 0.6m west of the junction of U.3 and 21. The northwest and southeast corners, therefore, show comparable indentations; the northeast and southwest corners were not revealed.

A set of 4 stone-faced steps (U.10-13) rise above U.6 in the approximate center of the

platform's south side. Only the western-most 0.5m of these risers was exposed so their east-west length is unknown. Their treads are 0.45-0.8m wide and they are bordered on the west by a 1.5m-wide stone balustrade (U.7). Unit 7 is 2.45m long north-south and rises ca. 0.3m above the steps. The balustrade consists largely of cut stone blocks mixed with some large cobbles. Fragments of white plaster were noted adhering to portions of U.7's faces.

Investigation of the summit was limited by the large crater created by illicit digging over much of the building's northeast quadrant and top. A 0.4m-wide stone foundation (U.8) was recorded extending at least 1.15m north onto the summit, in line with the east face of the U.7 balustrade. East of U.8 is a floor made from a combination of schist and cobbles (U.14). Based on the little evidence in hand, therefore, Str. 1A-12-1st's superstructure contained at least two rooms. Fronting the stairs is a stone-surfaced enclosure while another compartment lies immediately to the west. The dimensions of these rooms are unknown.

Structure 1A-12-1st, by the conclusion of TS.1, was a stone-faced platform that stood, on average, 2.5m high, measured 10.5x11.2m, and was oriented ca. 355 degrees. Its northwest and southeast basal corners were inset 0.3x0.6m; whether this manner of construction applies to the other two corners is unknown. Three, four, and five terraces ascend the building's west, south, and east flanks, respectively, though passage to the summit was apparently from the south side. Here a staircase composed of four risers ascends above the fourth southern terrace and is bordered by a stone balustrade on, at least, its west side. Two stone constructions projecting from the second ascending southern terrace face may have been designed to channel traffic in this area, though they do not lead directly to the steps. Instead, these enigmatic constructions might have been buttresses or defined the sides of a niche open to the south. The 1.2m-wide tread of the third ascending southern terrace may have been divided into two spaces by a short wall that projects south from the fourth ascending terrace riser. The areas thus defined measured an estimated 2.6m<sup>2</sup> and 5.9m<sup>2</sup> to the west and east of the putative dividing wall, respectively. The superstructure contained at least two rooms divided by a low stone foundation. One of these compartments has a stone floor and looks out over the staircase while its western neighbor may have been surfaced with earth.

The primary material used in making the vast majority of Str. 1A-12-1st's walls is cut stone mixed with large cobbles and some schist slabs. Dispersed remnants of plaster recorded on several terrace risers and treads suggest that the entirety of the building may have been covered with this material originally. Plaster floors were recorded extending south from the edifice's center-line and west and north from its northwest corner. The full extent of these extramural surfaces is unknown. Sockets for what look to have been stone tenons were recorded in the second ascending western terrace though we are uncertain how common these square indentations were.

## Time Span 2

Late in Str. 1A-12-1st's occupation sequence a layer of very fine-textured, light tan soil containing what seem to be small fragments of white plaster (S.3) was deposited against the platform's east side. Stratum 3 slopes up 0.61m over 0.82m from east-to-west, covering U.20-22, the three lowest eastern terraces. The maximum observed thickness of S.3 is 0.81m, though its base lies beyond excavation limits.

Overlying S.3 is a moderately dense concentration of small to medium-size cobbles set in a fine-textured, tan soil (F.1); it is the relatively high density of rocks that distinguishes F. 1 from

S.3. Though most of the stones included in F.1 were found lying horizontally, several near the bottom of the feature sloped down west-to-east following the contours of S.3's incline. Feature 1 has a maximum thickness of 0.46m, pinching out on the west against S.3 and the overlying S.2.

The behavioral significance of these deposits is unclear. No comparable accumulations of rock and soil were recorded elsewhere around Str. 1A-12-1st, implying that S.3 and F.1 were intentionally introduced to bury at least part of the platform's east flank. This could have been part of an effort to link Strs. 1A-12-1st and 1A-15 immediately to the east. As no excavations were pursued between the two edifices to locate walls that might have retained this putative fill on the north and south, the above interpretation remains no more than speculation. Alternatively, F.1 and S.3 might have been introduced to seal Str. 1A-12-1st's east side, blocking it from view. In either case, covering U.20-22 helped to make them some of the best-preserved constructions on the platform. The deposition of F.1 and S.3 may not have marked the end of Str. 1A-12-1st's use.

Time Span 3

Following abandonment, Str. 1A-12-1st was blanketed in part by the natural deposition of a fine-textured, light brown soil (S.2). Stratum 2 accumulated to as much as 0.55m off the platform's flanks, narrowing to as little as 0.12m where it covered the lower portions of construction. A lens of very fine-textured, light tan soil (F.2) was embedded within S.2 against Str. 1A-12-1st's south face. Feature 2 is maximally 0.27m thick where it overlies the U.25 floor and pinches out 1.32m south of U.4. This distinctive layer may have been formed from the remnants of eroded plaster intermixed with soil washing in from surrounding areas. Overlying S.2 and F.2 is a 0.04-0.26m thick layer of moderately coarse-textured, dark brown, root-rich soil (S.1). Embedded in S.1 and 2 is moderately dense concentration of rocks fallen from final-phase architecture (F.3). Feature 3's stones are densest over construction, declining in frequency with increasing distance from the platform.

Structure 1A-13

Structure 1A-13 closes off the west side of the plaza delimited by Strs. 1A-12/17. Structure 1A-12 is 5.7m to the north, Str. 1A-14 lies 4m to the southeast, and Str. 1A-16 is ca. 35m across the plaza to the east. Structure 1A-13 was apparently built over ground that sloped up 0.6m east-to-west over 19.5m. Digging here began with a trench laid across the platform's approximate center running east-west (Subop. 25AA). Subsequent excavations cleared portions of the edifice's north flank (Subop. 25AB), east side (Subop. 25AC and AH), and summit (Subop. 25AD and AE), ultimately resulting in the exposure of roughly 76m<sup>2</sup>. Excavations were pursued to maximum depths of 1.04m and 0.88m outside and within construction, respectively. Architectural preservation was poor throughout Str. 1A-13 and much of what follows is conjecture based on fragmentary remains. One major construction phase was identified in the course of this work which was directed by Daniel Contreras from March 30-May 16, 1995.

Time	Construction				
<u>Span</u>	<u>Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>

1	-	-	S.3	-	LCL II/II ?
2	Str. 1A-13-1st	U.1-8, 10, 12-22, 24-33	-	-	LCL II/III?
3	Str. 1A-13-1st	U.11	-	-	LCL III/II
4	Str. 1A-13-1st	U.9	S.2	F.1, 2	LCL III/II
5	Str. 1A-13-Sub1	U.23	-	-	LCL III, EPC
6	-	-	S.1, 2	F.3	

### Time Span 1

The deposition of S.3, a moderately coarse-textured, moderately loosely consolidated, brown to light brown sand, is the first activity attested to in Str. 1A-13-1st's immediate environs. This layer was exposed to a maximum thickness of 0.05m off the platform's east flank where it covers the lower 0.05m of Str. 1A-13-1st's basal terrace (U.1) and serves as foundation for U.2 (see below; S.3's base was not encountered in our excavations). Digging was not carried deep enough elsewhere around the building to reveal more of S.3 or other strata that accumulated prior to Str. 1A-13-1st's erection.

### Time Span 2

Most of the surviving portions of Str. 1A-13-1st were built at this time. On the east, four stone-faced terraces (U.1, 3-5) ascend to a massive (1.31m wide) stone summit wall (U.6). The basal riser (U.1) consists of a faced stone block that now tilts out 20 degrees away from the building but was probably originally set vertically. At least one other masonry block, this time laid horizontally, likely capped this element though only a few of these faced stones survived in place. The next three ascending terraces, U.3-5, are poorly preserved and difficult to distinguish from the dense concentration of stones that blankets the platform (F.3). From what can be inferred based on the fragmentary remains of these risers, they stood 0.59-0.66m high, and were 0.9-1.18m wide; U.1, at 0.68m high and 1.9m across, is the largest element in this set. It is impossible to say how these treads were surfaced. Unit 6, the summit step-up, rises 0.56m above the U.5 terrace. The great width of this construction (U.6 is 1.31m across) suggests that it probably served as the eastern wall of the platform's core against which all flanking terraces were built.

Unlike the east, where terraces rise above an earthen surface (the top of S.3), on the west a cobble surface (U. 12) runs for at least 1.7m west from its abutment with the basal riser, U.13. Six terraces grace this flank (U.13-18). These each ascend between 0.2-0.51m high and are 0.48-1.52m wide. The second ascending terrace (U.14) has the broadest tread, the remainder falling between 0.48-1.07m. How these terraces were surfaced remains unknown. The summit ascent, U.19, rises 0.4m above the upper-most terrace (U.18) and is very approximately 0.9m wide. Like its eastern counterpart (U.6), U.19 may define the west margin of the core platform against which the terraces were raised.

Only the lowest two terraces on Str. 1A-13-1st's north side were uncovered (U.21, 22). The basal facing, U.21, is 0.31m high and 0.96m wide. Above it rises U.22, 0.21m high and extending at least 0.68m to the south (its south end was not found). Both risers ascend above a ground surface that was apparently unimproved.

The earthen-floored summit, like the terraces, was very poorly preserved. It was apparently divided into four rooms by stone foundations that ranged from 0.2-0.6m thick by 0.12-0.46m high, most falling towards the shorter end of that continuum (U.20, 26-32). The southern enclosure is the largest, measuring 5.8m north-south by 7.6m east-west, and contains no built-in furniture. It does have faint traces of what might have been five niches, one built into the west wall (U.19) and the rest situated in the southern perimeter foundation (U.24). The western example covers 2m north-south and is 0.5m deep east-west. The southern examples are concentrated in the western 5m of U.24 and encompass, running west-to-east: 0.8m across by 0.55m deep; 0.65m across by 0.5m deep; 0.6m across by 0.5m deep, and 0.95m wide by 0.95m deep. Anywhere from 0.4-0.6m separate these indentations all of which seem to have been built at floor level. What looks like the remains of an entryway, bordered by low stone walls (0.22m high) approximately 1.75m apart, looks out over the western terraces and may have provided a formal passage into the summit's large southern room.

The northwest enclosure is reached through a 0.8m-wide door in its southeast corner. This passage skirts the east end of two overlapping footings (U.26 and 28) that separate it from the southern compartment. The northwest space measures 4m north-south by 4.9m east-west and may be bordered by a ca. 0.4m-high stone-faced and -surfaced bench built against the eastern wall (U.33). Unit 33 might have been L-shaped; its north-south running leg is 2.4m wide east-west by 3.2m long north-south. The stem of the "L" projects 1.55m west from U.33's north end and is 1.3m wide north-south.

A low wall (U.27; ca. 0.2m high) projects 1m north from U.26 into the northwest room. Its architectural significance is unclear as it stops well short of the compartment's north wall and so probably did not subdivide the enclosed space.

The northeast enclosure encompasses 1.25m north-south by 2.45m east-west. Passage to it from the northwest enclosure is seemingly blocked by U.31, a footing that runs west from the U.33 bench. A 1.15m-wide door in the southeast corner of the northeast room provides passage to the southern compartment. The U.33 bench defines the northeast room's north side, suggesting that those occupying that furniture had easy access to both of the northern enclosures.

A low wall (U.32) lying in the south room 0.5m west of the door to the northeast enclosure may, with U.29 and 30 to the west and north, respectively, have created a fourth cubicle covering 1.65m east-west by 1.9m north-south. This room was open to the south into the rest of the southern compartment.

The small amounts of the platform's fill that were exposed consisted primarily of earth. Unit 7, which underlies the eastern terraces, is a moderately fine-textured, hard-compacted, tan soil. On the summit, portions of two fill units were identified. Underlying eastern construction is U.8, a moderately coarse-textured, loosely compacted, dark gray soil that includes both ash and bajareque fragments. To the west, U.10 is a moderately coarse-textured, moderately loosely consolidated, brown to light brown sand. Digging did not extend more than 0.33m into fill.

Unit 2, a 0.2m-high by, minimally, 0.1m-wide wall abuts U.1, the east basal terrace facing, and runs for at least 1.2m east (U.2's full width and length were not exposed). This construction sits on S.3 and seems to be the remnants of a surface-level building raised against Str. 1A-13-1st late in TS. 2.

By the conclusion of TS. 2, Str. 1A-13-1st was an earthen-filled platform that stood 2.6m high on the east and 3.2m tall on the west, covered 19.5m east-west by 20.8m north-south, and was oriented roughly 165 degrees. Its east flank was mounted by four terraces the lowest of which was faced with cut blocks and, at 1.9m across, was the widest terrace identified on Str. 1A-13-1st. On the west, six terraces rise above a cobble surface that extends for at least 1.7m westward. Two terraces were unearthed on the edifice's north side, though excavations here were not carried up to the summit. All terraces save the basal eastern example are poorly preserved and lack clearly defined exterior facings. We may have uncovered the fill backing terrace risers that were originally fashioned of other materials, such as masonry blocks. The superstructure contains four earthen-floored rooms; a large southern enclosure covering 44.1m<sup>2</sup> and with five niches built into its walls (one in the western and four in the southern foundations); a northwestern enclosure encompassing 19.6m<sup>2</sup> and with an extensive, 0.4m-high, stone-faced and -surfaced L-shaped bench built against its east wall; a small northeastern compartment measuring 3.1m<sup>2</sup> and bounded on the north by the aforementioned bench; and a 3.1m<sup>2</sup> compartment that opens into the southern room from the north. Passages among all of these enclosures have been identified and the complex itself was possibly entered through a 1.75m-wide formal entryway located in the northwest corner of the southern room. A modest surface-level building with stone foundations but of uncertain dimensions was built against Str. 1A-13-1st's east side.

### Time Span 3

Little changed on Str. 1A-13-1st during this interval. The only modification assigned to TS.3 is the blanketing of the U.12 cobble floor by 0.17m of fill composed of small cobbles (U.11). This deposit apparently was the foundation for a white plaster floor only a few, dispersed fragments of which survived. The introduction of U.11 covered the western basal terrace facing (U.13); presumably U.14 now served as the initial riser on this side. Such a shift reduced the platform's east-west dimension to 19m.

### Time Span 4

During this interval Str. 1A-13-1st's summit was largely blanketed by a moderately coarse-textured, moderately loosely compacted, brown to light brown sand (U.9). Unit 9 is as much as 0.27m thick, being deepest near the summit's center and tailing off towards its margins. Overlying U.9 on the west is a lens of very fine textured, loosely consolidated, light gray ashy soil (F.1). Feature 1 pinches out near the top of U.9, reaching its maximum thickness of 0.51m on the summit's west margin. This deposit is apparently limited to the putative doorway from the western terraces into the summit room. Feature 2, a lens of fine-textured, loosely consolidated, very light tan soil with some included bajareque fragments, overlies the western limit of F.1. Feature 2 extends 0.52m west of F.1 and has a maximum observed thickness of 0.18m. Unit 9, F.1, and F.2 seem to be deposits laid down after Str. 1A-13-1st was no longer in use, possibly to seal and terminate this construction.

Also possibly deposited at this time is the 0.28m of S.2, a moderately coarse-textured, moderately hard-compacted, brown soil, noted off Str. 1A-13-1st's east flank.. This portion of S.2 covers all of U.2, the putative surface-level building raised next to the platform, and most of U.1, the eastern basal terrace facing. Seemingly, Str. 1A-13-1st was no longer being maintained

now, dirt being allowed to accumulate, at least against its east side. At about the same time the summit was sealed with a mixture of dirt and cultural debris.

### Time Span 5

Unit 23 was raised atop the aforementioned segment of S.2, 1.2m east of U.1 and over the top of U.2's exposed east end. Unit 23 is a 0.18m-high wall that is made of unmodified cobbles, is one stone wide (0.28m), and was traced for 1m running at an angle of approximately 350 degrees. This may be part of a foundation from a surface-level building (Str. 1A-13-Sub1) that was raised well after Str. 1A-13-1st had fallen into disuse. No other portions of this construction were encountered in excavations.

### Time Span 6

It was over this protracted span that architecture on and around Str. 1A-13-1st was covered by the continued natural accumulation of S.2. Capping S.2 is a 0.08-0.18m thick deposit of S.1, a moderately coarse-textured, moderately hard-compacted, dark brown, root-rich soil. Embedded in S.1 and the upper portions of S.2 is a variably dense concentration of stones fallen from final-phase architecture (F.3). Feature 3 is particularly dense over construction, dropping off dramatically in the number and density of its component rocks beyond architectural limits. So dense is F.3 where it overlies the western and eastern terraces that it is difficult to distinguish it from the poorly reserved remains of extant construction. It may be that F.3 contains at least some stones that were purposefully introduced to cover these terraces, either to terminate their use or in preparation for raising additional constructions that were never finished (see Str. 1A-14-1st, below). In most cases, however, a clear downward slant was noted among the F.3 rocks, indicating that they had fallen from further up the building and had not been carefully laid in position.

### Structure 1A-14

Structure 1A-14 delimits the south side of the plaza bounded by Strs. 1A-12/17. Structure 1A-13 is ca. 4m to the northwest, Str. 1A-16 lies 8m to the northeast, while Str. 1A-15 is 20m to the north on the opposite side of the plaza. Digging here took the form of two, 1m-wide trenches that cut across the platform's approximate center running north-south and east-west, augmented by some lateral clearing of exposed architecture (Subop. 25A/F). These excavations intersected on the summit. All-in-all, ca. 69m<sup>2</sup> were exposed here. These excavations were carried down to maximum depths of 1.68m and 2.04m below modern ground surface outside and within construction, respectively. One major construction phase was identified in the course of this work. The investigation of Str. 1A-14 during the 1988 field season was directed by Patricia Whooley and Patricia Reed.

### Time Spans

<u>Time</u> <u>Span</u>	<u>Construction</u> <u>Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
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1	-	-	S.3, 5, 6	-	LCL II/I ?
2	Str. 1A-14-1st	U.1-8, 10, 12 14-17, 19, 20-22, 23, 24- 38, 40-42, 44, 49-50, 52, 53, 56	-	F.4?	LCL II/III
3	Str. 1A-14-1st	U.9, 46	-	-	LCL II/III
4	Str. 1A-14-1st	U.11, 13 18, 39, 43, 45, 47, 48, 51, 54, 57	-	F.2	LCL III/II
5	Str. 1A-14-1st	U.55	-	F.1,3, 5	LCL III, EPC
6	-	-	S.1, 2, 4	F. 4?, 6	

### Time Span 1

The earliest activities identified in excavations pursued in the environs of Str. 1A-14 are the deposition of S.3, 5, and 6. Stratum 5, a fine-textured, hard-compacted, brown clay with many small (1cm or less in diameter) soft white inclusions, was exposed to a thickness of 0.73m off Str. 1A-14-1st's south flank. The base of this layer was not encountered and its top descends 0.11m south-to-north over the 1.7m it was exposed. Stratum 3 is a coarse-textured, loosely compacted, tan sand with some included pebbles 1cm or less in diameter that blankets S.5 by 0.24-0.39m. This soil layer was also encountered off the building's north side where it is at least 0.45m thick (S.3's base was not uncovered here). Stratum 3 closely resembles fill recovered within Str. 1A-14-1st (U.44) and may have been introduced to level out the ground on which that platform was raised. At present there is no strong evidence that favors or negates such an interpretation.

A moderately coarse-textured, hard-compacted, tan soil (S.6) was revealed extending for at least 0.19m below the plaster floor (U.1) that fronts Str. 1A-14-1st on the east. Stratum 6's base lies beyond our excavation limits. This earth may have been introduced as bedding for the aforementioned floor; the stones underlying the plaster surface are set in a matrix identical to S.6. Excavations were not carried deep enough west of construction to identify soils laid down during TS.1.

By the end of TS.1, the ground on which Str. 1A-14-1st was raised ascended 0.7m over 19.2m east-to-west and 0.7m across 18m north-to-south. Artifacts recovered from the strata that accumulated over this span point to human occupation at this locale prior to the initiation of construction in TS.2.

### Time Span 2

Construction on Str. 1A-14-1st was initiated during this span. One of the first steps taken in this process was laying down a white plaster floor along the east, west, and south flanks of the platform (U.1, 17, and 23, respectively). This construction is made up of a 0.1-0.18m-thick bedding of densely packed medium to small cobbles over which is laid a 0.02-0.08m thick deposit of crushed limestone plaster. The stone foundation is set in a coarse-textured, moderately hard-compacted, tan sand. The plaster does not seem to have been intensively fired; it easily breaks into fragments and, on the south (U.23), has largely disintegrated. The plaster floor continues 3.6m, 1.8m, and 3.5m away from Str. 1A-14-1st on the south, west, and east, respectively, disappearing into the excavation limits in each case. The southern, western, and eastern basal terrace facings sit on this floor; on the south, the floor (U.23 in this case) was traced running under the first three ascending terraces (U.24-26).

Interestingly, the one exposed flank where a formal surface was not encountered was the north where Str. 1A-14-1st fronts the plaza. Here the unmodified surface of S.3 apparently served as the level above which the platform rose. A 0.02-0.04m-thick level of small, rounded stones (F.4) extends 2.22m north of the basal facing on this side (U.33), sloping down 0.13m over this distance from south-to-north. This may be the remnants of a rather casual floor or debris fallen from final-phase architecture after Str. 1A-14-1st's abandonment.

The earliest exposed fragment of construction pertaining to Str. 1A-14 is a 0.29m-high cobble wall (U.56) revealed for 1m running approximately 358 degrees. Unit 56 is on the platform's summit, buried by U.44 fill, and located directly beneath U.9, an addition built during TS.3. This stratigraphic position suggests that U.56 belongs to a version of Str. 1A-14 that was superseded by the constructions described below. How this iteration relates to the floors described above and what its dimensions were remain unknown.

Structure 1A-14-1st is fronted by six stone-faced terraces on the north (U.33-38) and east (U.2-7), seven on the south (U.24-30), and four risers on the west (U.19-22). These ascents are commonly built using a mix of cobbles and faced blocks, the latter usually forming the uppermost course. The principal exception to this pattern is the northern basal facing, U.33, in which the riser is constructed using a cut block set vertically and surmounted by a horizontally-laid piece of masonry. The treads in each case are composed of a combination of stones, mostly unshaped, and earth. Terrace heights range from 0.1-0.88m and they are 0.19-1.42m across. It is not clear how the summit was reached. On the east U.2 (0.88m high) provides a serious obstacle to any ascent, on the other sides, however, the tallest surviving risers are no more than 0.64m tall (U.21, the third ascending terrace on the west, is 0.64m high, U.28, the fifth ascending southern terrace, rises 0.6m, and U.34, the second northern terrace, also stands 0.6m tall). It may be that the superstructure was attained by scaling the north, west, and/or south flanks.

The placement of particularly wide terraces varies somewhat by side. The broadest examples on the north, U.34 and 38, 1.44m and 1.42m across, respectively, are the second and sixth ascending terraces, U.27 and 28 on the south, 1.22m and 1.21m across, in turn, are the fourth and fifth terraces on this side as are U.21 and 22 on the west, measuring 1.21m and 1.43m wide, respectively. The east flank is characterized by relatively narrow treads, ranging from 0.46-0.93m wide.

The step-ups to the summit are generally low cobble walls 0.2-0.45m high by 0.73-0.84m wide (U.8, 16, and 31; the northern step-up is covered by later construction and was not exposed). The southern and western step-ups (U.31 and 16) are the lowest (0.2 and 0.24m tall); U.16 gives way directly to the bench in the west room (U.15).

Limited excavations on the summit revealed the remains of three earthen-floored rooms

delimited by substantial stone foundations for perishable upper walls. These footings measure 0.2-0.57m high (U.8, 12, 14, 16, 40-42, 53; not enough of them was exposed to reveal their widths). The compartments are arranged in an east-west line; the western example covers 2.85m east-west by at least 1.4m north-south while the central enclosure encompasses 1.5x3.95m (the northern foundation of the west room was not uncovered). A 0.44m-high by ca. 2.3m-wide (east-west) stone-faced and -surfaced bench (U.15) is built against the western enclosure's southwest corner and takes up most of the available space. A 0.5m-wide gap in the southeast corner of the west room provided a likely passage into the central compartment through the latter's southwest corner. The eastern room covers 4.55m east-west by at least 1m north-south (its foundations in these last two directions were not found). A 0.38m-high by 1.47m-wide (east-west) stone-faced and -surfaced bench (U.10) occupies most of this compartment's exposed west wall. The area separating the western and central rooms was not excavated, leaving us in doubt how this enclosure might have been connected to other portions of the superstructure. There does not seem to have been enough space on the summit for additional rooms though the broad terraces on Str. 1A-14-1st's north, south, and west flanks may have provided additional living and work space beyond the superstructure's confines.

The platform's fill (U.44) consists primarily of a coarse-textured, loosely consolidated, tan sand in which are found numerous small pebbles (generally less than 1cm in diameter but increasing in size up to 3cm in diameter at greater depths). Unit 44 is identical to S.3 and may have been mined from natural deposits of that earth layer or both could have been introduced as fill (see TS. 1). Very few artifacts were recovered from U.44. Where fill backing terrace faces was uncovered it invariably consisted of densely packed cobbles set in a moderately coarse-textured, loosely consolidated, brown soil nearly identical to S.2 (U.48, 49, and 50 backing terraces U.25, 27, and 24 on the south). In the case of the U.25 terrace, this stone-and-earth hearting was underlain by a 0.12-0.14m thick layer of moderately coarse-textured, hard-compacted, light brown soil (U.47). Unit 47, like U.50 backing the U.24 terrace to the south, directly overlay the U.23 plaster floor.

By the end of TS. 2, Str. 1A-14-1st was an earth-and-stone-filled platform standing 1.5-2.2m high, measuring 17.75m north-south by 18.6m east-west, and was aligned roughly 272 degrees. Bordering the building on all sides but the north was a plaster floor set on a densely packed layer of medium to small cobbles. These surfaces extended at least 3.6m, 1.8m, and 3.5m from the platform's basal facings on the south, west, and east, respectively. The building was fronted by six stone-faced terraces on the north and east, seven on the south, and four on the west. These constructions were 0.1-0.88m high. The summit may have been reached by ascending the west, north, and south terraces; a 0.88m-high riser on the east likely blocked passage on this side. The superstructure contained three earthen-floored rooms set in an east-west line; the western and central compartments are joined by a 0.5m-wide doorway at the southern terminus of their shared wall. The western compartment covers at least 4m<sup>2</sup> most of which is taken up by a 0.44m-high by 2.3m-wide stone-faced and -surfaced bench set against the west room wall. Its eastern neighbor encompasses 5.9m<sup>2</sup> and has no built-in furniture. On the east what looks to have been the most spacious of the triad is 4.55m across east-west and contained a 0.38m-high by 1.47m-wide stone-faced and -surfaced bench built against its west wall. It is not clear how this enclosure was related to its western neighbors. Two broad terraces (1.21-1.44m across) on all sides save the east might have afforded additional spaces for activities conducted outside the superstructure.

### Time Span 3

During this interval U.8, the eastern stone-faced summit step-up, was enlarged by the construction of a cobble wall (U.9) that extends 1.33m into the eastern summit room from U.8. Unit 9 runs at the same height as U.8 and its addition reduces the amount of open floor space in the eastern enclosure to 1.28m east-west. The U.10 bench was apparently still in use at this time. The architectural significance of U.9 is unclear; it may be another bench, but at 0.66m high it would be an unusually tall one in the Late Classic Naco valley corpus. Alternatively, U.9 may have been added to create a raised activity area on the superstructure's east margin. This plinth, including U.8 and 9, measures 2.06m across, east-west, and overlooks the six relatively narrow stone-faced terraces that mount Str. 1A-14-1st's east flank.

At some point in this sequence, a 0.21-0.26m-thick layer of moderately coarse-textured, hard-compacted, tan soil (U.46) was introduced into the eastern summit room. Unit 46 blankets the earlier fill (U.44), the top of which originally served as the TS.2 floor, and covered all but the upper 0.1m of the U.10 bench; U.9 still projected 0.44m above the newly introduced fill. It remains unclear, however, whether U.46 was deposited during TS.3 or was part of a later filling-in of the summit, possibly dating to TS. 4 when U.45 was laid down over most of the summit. In either case, U.46's deposition would not have radically changed the organization of the eastern room, though the U.10 bench would have been considerably shorter after this fill was introduced.

Structure 1A-14-1st would not have been considerably altered as a result of the renovations initiated in TS. 3. The primary changes were made to the eastern summit room where a 2.06m-wide stone-faced and surfaced plinth was created through additions made to the earlier summit step-up, U.8. This change greatly reduced the amount of open floor space in the eastern enclosure (now covering 1.28m across east-west) and created an extensive, raised platform atop the eastern terrace system. Somewhere between 0.21-0.26m of earthen fill may have been deposited in the eastern compartment at this time, reducing the height of the U.10 bench that occupies the room's west wall to 0.1m.

### Time Span 4

The major renovations dating to this interval mostly took place on the summit where the earlier superstructure rooms were now filled by a moderately coarse-textured, hard-compacted, light to reddish-brown soil (U.45). The addition of U.45 to the eastern room completely buried the U.10 bench and left only 0.11m of U.9 still visible. No built-in furniture was found in this transformed version of the compartment, though such constructions may well lie beyond the 1m-wide exposure we cleared across this space. At the very least, the U.10 bench that formerly took up so much of the eastern room's floor space was not replaced by a comparable construction built against the enclosure's west wall. The eastern room now measured 2.87m across east-west.

In the western compartment the stone-surfaced top of the U.15 bench apparently still protruded above the U.45 fill but it no longer served as a bench. The construction of U.54, a 0.18m-high cobble wall set in the U.45 fill and over-riding U.42, defines the eastern limit of this enclosure. A 0.5m-wide gap in the southeast corner of the eastern room still provides passage between it and the central enclosure. The western room covers 2.9m east-west of which the western-most 2.3m was paved with stones that originally were part of the U.15 bench.

The central enclosure measures 2.28m east-west by 2.35m north-south. Its southern and

eastern sides are defined by stone footings that rest atop their immediate predecessors (U.13 sits on U.14 on the south while U.57 succeeds U.41 on the east). Unit 31 still bounds the room on the south. Unit 43, a 0.12m-high by 0.28m-wide stone wall abuts U.13 on the south and projects 1.05m north into the central room. Its construction divides the space into two equal portions, each measuring 1m across east-west. Unit 43 does not run the full north-south width of the room, stopping 1.3m south of U.39's south face (see below).

A 0.29m-high stone construction (U.11) projects 0.64m west into the central room from U.57, the new eastern perimeter wall. Unit 11 is 1.2m long north-south and abuts both U.31 (the south summit wall) and U.57. At about the same time, U.39, a 0.51m-high by 1.64m wide, north-south, stone construction was built against the central enclosure's north wall. Unit 39 over-rides the previous northern foundation, U.40, and, though poorly preserved, seems to span the entirety of the central enclosure's north side (1.9m long in this incarnation). Units 11 and 39 may be a shelf and bench, respectively. If so, their construction in the central enclosure marks a significant change from the preceding arrangement of summit space in which wide, stone benches occupied the flanking east and west compartments while the central room lacked built-in furniture. A ca. 0.4m-wide gap in U.57, the eastern foundation, may have been a door leading into the eastern enclosure.

Changes elsewhere on Str. 1A-14-1st were minimal. Unit 18, a 0.4m-high by 1m-wide stone-faced terrace capped by cut stone blocks, was appended to the platform's west side, covering the earlier basal riser on this side, U.19. Unit 18 rests on the U.17 extramural plaster floor and is backed by a fill composed of densely packed small to large stones set in a moderately coarse-textured, hard-compacted, brown soil (U.51). On the east, a 0.43m-high stone-faced terrace (F.2) may have been raised atop, and replaced, the U.6 riser. Feature 2 was so badly preserved, however, that its existence remains uncertain. If it was added at this time, the putative terrace would have been 1.28m wide, burying U.6 and the succeeding U.7. Such an addition would have reduced the number of terraces on the east flank to five, U.8 still serving as the summit step up.

Structure 1A-14-1st now stood 2.1-2.8m tall, measured 17.75m north-south by 19.6m east-west, and retained its earlier orientation of ca. 272 degrees. The plaster floor that bounded the platform on all sides except the north was still in use and the terraces that ascended Str. 1A-14-1st's flanks were much the same as they had been since TS. 2. The principal differences were that a new basal riser was added to the edifice's west side, expanding Str. 1A-14-1st's dimensions by 1m, and the six terraces that formerly graced the east flank may have been reduced to five by the construction of a new fifth riser. The summit, however, was significantly transformed. The previous plan of three rooms set in an east-west line was retained, though all were filled to some extent with earth, thereby raising the summit's surface. This in-filling covered the benches that once took up most of the eastern and western compartments, converting these enclosures into largely featureless spaces measuring 2.87m and 2.9m across east-west (the eastern and western rooms, in turn). The western 2.3m of the west compartment was paved with the cobbles making up the top of the old U.15 bench; otherwise the summit rooms were floored with earth. The central enclosure covers 5.4m<sup>2</sup>, divided roughly in half by a short wall that projects 1.05m north from the southern footing (the eastern and western segments of this room each measures roughly 2.35m<sup>2</sup>). A stone shelf was erected in the southeast corner of the central room while a wide, stone-faced and -surfaced bench occupies all of the northern wall. This bench seemingly looks south through the 0.8m-wide gap between the shelf (U.11) and the dividing wall (U.43) over the southern terraces. Passage between the central and western room

was still via a 0.5m-wide door in the former's southwest corner while a 0.4m-wide door linked the central and eastern rooms.

### Time Span 5

During this interval the summit rooms were filled with a moderately coarse-textured, hard-compacted brown to light brown soil (U.55). Embedded in this matrix is a 0.3-0.35m-thick dense concentration of small to large stones (mostly cobbles, F.3) that over-rides all earlier architecture. No walls or any sort of superstructure construction were noted rising above this fill. Similar (F.1 and 5) deposits of stone were noted on Str.1A-14-1st's east and west flanks. Features 1 and 5, composed of densely packed small to large rocks set in a moderately coarse-textured, hard-compacted, brown soil, covered the basal two (U.2 and 3) and three terraces (U.18-21) on the platform's east and west sides, respectively. Unlike tumbled rocks, many of the stones in F.1 and 5 are flat-laid, as though they had been intentionally placed. It may be that U.55 and F.1, 3, and 5 are fill units for constructions that were never finished. Alternatively, they may have been introduced as parts of termination deposits, definitively signaling the end of Str. 1A-14-1st's use. Interestingly, no signs of such late additions were noted on the platform's south and north flanks.

### Time Span 6

Following Str. 1A-14-1st's abandonment, S.4, a moderately coarse-textured, hard-compacted, brown soil, accumulated against the building's east, west, and south sides. On the north a coarse-textured, hard-compacted, brown sand (S.2) blanketed S.3 and covered the U.33-36 terraces. Burying both earth levels is S.1, a 0.12-0.21m-thick, moderately fine-textured, hard-compacted, dark brown, root rich soil. Embedded in S.1, 2, and 4 is a variably dense concentration of rocks seemingly fallen from final-phase architecture (F.6). These stones are particularly numerous where they overlie construction, thinning out with greater distance from the building. The only side of Str. 1A-14-1st where tumble is light is the north where F.4, a 0.02-0.04m-thick level of consistently small cobbles, extends 2.22m north of U.33, the north basal terrace facing. As noted in the discussion of TS.2, F.4 may be the remnants of a casual floor set against the platform's north flank or a line of dispersed tumble. Very dense concentrations of rocks covering U.6, 7, 22, 24-26, and 33-36 (all terraces) may be parts of the putative fill described under F.1 and 5 in TS.5.

### Chronological Summary

Relatively few artifacts were recovered in the course of excavations conducted in Op. 25 (a fairly common situation for most monumental constructions at La Sierra). No samples suitable for radiometric dating were recovered to amplify and test chronological assessments based on the relative dating of artifacts. Consequently, the following age estimates are derived from the study of stratigraphic relations and the analysis of relatively small artifact samples and must be treated as tentative.

The earliest evidence of occupation identified in Op. 25 dates to the transition between the Late Classic II/I. A few Late Classic (LCL) I diagnostics were recovered from deposits where they were mixed with material from later periods. The paucity of LCL I sherds, together

with the absence of undisturbed deposits and architecture associated with this material, implies that LCL I settlement in Op. 25's environs was dispersed. This situation changes dramatically during the Late Classic II/III transition when the cores of all three excavated buildings were raised. They may have remained in use into the Late Classic III/II, Strs. 1A-12-1st, 1A-13-1st, and 1A-14-1st likely undergoing varying degrees of renovation at this time. It is likely that the three investigated platforms saw only slight and casual use during the full Late Classic III. The systematic dismantling of Str. 1A-13-1st may well date to the LCL III as did the burial of much of this platform and Str. 1A-14-1st under earth-and-stone fill (see Op. 37, Str. 1A-16-1st for a similar pattern of stone removal and covering of late-phase architecture). The modest construction raised off Str. 1A-13-1st's east flank (Str. 1A-13-Sub1) likely dates to late in the Terminal Classic, given its stratigraphic position high up in earth that accumulated against its much larger neighbor's east side. A few diagnostic Early Postclassic (EPC) sherds were recovered from the vicinities of Strs. 1A-13-1st and 1A-14-1<sup>st</sup>, pointing to a light occupation and/or use of this area; no constructions are clearly assignable to this span.