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PVN OP 028 Excavation Report

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Operation 28

Operation 28 encompasses Structures 1A-18, 19, and 100 in the La Sierra site core. These edifices make up a line of buildings that roughly parallels Str. 1A-16 and 17 (Op. 37), 11m to the west, and comes on the south to within 13m of Str. 1A-51, the western building in the ballcourt (see Op.30). Structures 1A-18 and 19 are monumental edifices set in a roughly north-south line joined by what looks on the surface like a low platform, or saddle. Structure 1A-100 is a diminutive construction that barely protrudes above modern ground surface and lies approximately 1.5m southwest of Str. 1A-18's southwest corner. All-in-all, Op. 28 covers ca. 2,300m². Excavations were pursued here, under the direction of Garrett Silliman, on Strs. 1A-18 and 100 over two months in 1995. Fully 119m² were uncovered in the course of this work.

Structure 1A-18

Structure 1A-18 is the southern member of the pair of monumental platforms that run north-south through the approximate center of Op. 28. Structure 1A-19 is ca. 3m to the north and, based on surface remains, is joined to its southern neighbor by a low saddle. The smallest surface-visible component of Op. 28, Str. 1A-100, lies 1.5m southwest of Str. 1A-18's southwest corner while Str. 1A-51, the western ballcourt edifice, is 13m to the south. The land on which Str. 1A-18 was built rises 0.54m over 16m east-to-west. Digging at and around Str. 1A-18 was conducted in Subop. 28B and C; a 24.6m-long trench that cut across the platform's approximate center running east-west while additional, more limited probes revealed most of the platform's summit and the edifice's northeast, southwest, and southeast corners. Roughly 69m² was cleared in all. Excavations directed by G. Silliman were pursued to maximum depths of 1.3m and 0.77m below modern ground surface outside and within architecture, respectively, revealing one major construction phase. Limited probing of construction fill, however, leaves open the possibility that earlier versions of the platform have gone undetected.

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-18-1st	U.1-10, 12-26	-	-	LCL II/III
2	Str. 1A-18-1st	U.11, 23	-	-	LCL II/III
3	Str. 1A-18-1st	-	S.3	F.1	LCL III/EPC
4	-	-	S.1, 2	F.2	-

Time Span 1

Structure 1A-18-1st is a stone-faced platform mounted by eight terraces on the east and three risers on the west. On the east, the building ascends above a white plaster floor (U.3) that

extends at least 1.55m to the east (its eastern limit lies beyond our excavations). Unit 3 rises 0.08m over its uncovered distance from west to east. The western basal riser (U.14) overlooks a flat stone pavement (U.2) that runs 1.5m to the west before ending in a large schist slab. A distance of 0.55m composed of unmodified earth separates U.2 from U.1 further to the west. The latter is a white plaster floor that extends 4.9m westward before leaving our excavations. Unit 1 is 0.08m below the level of U.2 and rises 0.06m from east to west over its uncovered extent. Though U.1 and 2 were probably used at the same time, making up a single floor, why they were separated by earth remains uncertain. No clear signs of stone or plaster flooring were noted off Str. 1A-18-1st's north and south flanks, though excavations in these locales were too limited to yield definitive results on this score.

The three lowest eastern terraces (U.4-6) are short and narrow enough (0.22-0.37m high by 0.25-0.28m across) to qualify as steps. Unit 4, the basal step, rests on the U.3 floor. All three risers, in the 1m-wide segment revealed in the axial trench, were composed of horizontally laid cut blocks sometimes supported by small cobbles and schist slabs. Unit 6, the uppermost step of the three, has a tread that measures 1.03m across and is succeeded by U.7, a terrace that stands 0.35m high and is 1.05m wide. The treads in both cases were surfaced with a mix of stones and earth while U.7's facing consists of unmodified cobbles. Unit 8, the next ascending eastern terrace, is 0.67m high by 1.69m wide; the relatively great thickness of the cobble riser itself (0.71m across) implies that U.8 was a major retaining wall onto which U.4-7 were anchored. The U.9 and 10 terraces, the risers of which are fashioned of cut blocks, rise above the U.8 terrace, ascending an estimated 0.23m and 0.4m, respectively, towards the summit. The lower of the pair, U.9, is 0.7m wide while U.10 runs back 1.12m to U.12 which rises 0.24m above the U.10 tread. Unit 12 consists of an upper course of cut blocks resting on a foundation of small cobbles. The summit step-up, U.13, is 0.33m west of U.12 and stands ca. 0.29m above that terrace's tread (U.8-10 and 13 are not well preserve; their heights and composition are inferred from their deteriorated remains). The central 2.55m of U.13 incorporates at least one course of masonry blocks, the remainder of the wall to the north and south is fashioned of cobbles.

Unit 14, the basal western terrace facing, rises an estimated 1.4m above U.2, though the relationship between these constructions is unclear. The basal tread is 1.46m wide and gives way to U.15, a 0.48m-high by 2.09m-wide terrace that, in turn, leads to U.16. The latter is 0.62m high by 1.46m wide. Units 14 and 15 are made from a mix of cut blocks and cobbles while U.16 is fashioned of unmodified river-rounded stones.

Only 1m of the southern (U.21) and 0.25m of the northern basal walls (U.22) were revealed in our excavations. Though these fragments helped identify Str. 1A-28-1st's northeast, southwest, and southeast corners they were insufficiently exposed to determine their dimensions and manner of construction.

The summit supports one large room, encompassing 4.1x22.1m bounded by low (ca. 0.29m high) stone foundations for perishable upper walls (U.13, 17, 19, and 20). Unit 17, the western foundation, seems to step back 0.5m to the east about mid-way along its length, behind, west of, the summit bench (U.18). The exact location of this indentation was not identified.

A 0.2m-high stone-faced bench (U.18) is built into the approximate center of the room's west wall. Unit 18 measures 0.8-1.25m across east-west and is at least 3.6m long north-south (its southern end was not uncovered). At 2.2m south of U.18's north end the bench steps out 0.45m to the east, continuing along this line for at least 1.4m to the south; U.18 is 1.25m wide from this point southward. Unit 18 was made using river cobbles. Fronting the bench to the

east is a low (ca. 0.12m high) stone construction that is 0.3m wide and built against the eastern summit step-up (all included in U.13). This narrow element is roughly 4.35m long north-south (its north margin is unclear) and parallels the U.18 bench with which it seems to be paired. This portion of the U.13 summit construction may be a formal threshold into the superstructure. The summit floor was apparently paved using a mixture of stones, including some schist slabs, and earth.

The fill backing U.8 (U.24), U.10 (U.23), U.14 (U.26), and U.16 (U.25) consists of densely packed medium to large river cobbles set in a fine-textured, moderately soft-compacted, tan clay. No probes were dug into the summit to reveal the central portion of the platform's hearting.

Structure 1A-18-1st is a 3.14m- and 2.6m-high (on the east and west, respectively) stone-faced platform that measures 16.02m east-west by 30.2m north-south, and is aligned approximately 188 degrees. Eight terraces and steps rise above a white plaster floor on the east while three risers ascend the west flank where a stone-and-plaster floor extends west for at least 6.95m. Passage to the summit was apparently from the east where the relatively low risers lead to a 0.3m-wide by 4.35m-long stone threshold in the approximate center of the superstructure's east side. The concentration of masonry blocks in constructions on this flank, including the central portion of the eastern summit step-up (U.13) supports the notion that traffic to the summit was channeled up this flank. The superstructure itself consists of one earth-and-stone-floored room that covers 90.6m². A stone-faced bench, measuring 0.2m high, 0.8-1.25m wide, and at least 3.6m long, is set against the western wall of this enclosure and looks out to the east over the putative threshold. No other furniture or room dividers were revealed in our investigation of the summit.

Time Span 2

The only activity clearly attested to during this interval was the burying of the U.12 terrace on the east under stone-and-earth fill (a continuation of U.23) and its replacement by U.11. Unit 11 stands 0.35m high and runs back 0.97m to the west to the summit step-up, U.13. The addition of U.11 reduced the U.10 tread to 1.47m across and U.13 now projected only 0.19m on its east side. The number of eastern terraces, however, remained unchanged. Unit 11 was built using a combination of cut blocks, schist slabs, and cobbles.

Time Span 3

During this interval most of Str. 1A-18-1st's west side was covered with a mix of stones and earth. Stratum 3, a lens of fine-textured, moderately hard-compacted, tan clay, covers U.2 by as much as 0.67m up against the base of U.14, the western basal terrace. The top of this soil level drops 0.7m over 4.94m west from that point, eventually pinching out against U.1, the white plaster floor. Coterminous with S.3, and extending as much as 0.26m into this layer, is a dense concentration of small to large river cobbles and a few cut blocks (F.1). Feature 1 in this area is 0.25-0.8m thick, reaching its maximum depth up against U.14 but remaining well defined until it ends equal with the western margin of S.3. Most of the F.1 stones were found lying flat, as though they had been purposefully placed. Unlike other cobble deposits that overlie earlier construction in La Sierra's site core, there are faint hints of terraces built into F.1. Poorly preserved, and detected only in the excavation section, there are four of these putative risers.

The basal, western element (F.1.1) rises 0.2m above S.3 and is 0.95m wide. It is succeeded on the east by F.1.2, also 0.2m tall but 1.79m across. Feature 1.3 ascends 0.32m above the F.1.2 tread and runs back 1m where it is succeeded by F.1.4. The latter is 0.24m tall by 0.38m wide and intersects U.14 which projects 0.37m above the addition. A course of masonry blocks caps what seem to be cobble foundations in the risers of F.1.3 and 1.4; only river-worn stones were recovered in and around F.1.1 and 1.2. As the “feature” designation implies, these putative terraces are far from clear, their former existence far from certain. Nevertheless, the patterned arrangement of stones within this lower, western segment of F.1 is sufficiently suggestive to hint at the former existence of a set of terraces that was added to at least the central portion of Str. 1A-18-1st’s west side late in its occupation. Features 1.1-1.4 would have made it possible to reach the platform’s summit from both the east and west flanks for the first time in Str. 1A-18-1st’s known history.

Further upslope, remnants of F.1 were found covering most or all of U.15 and 16 while on the east comparably dense concentrations of stones covered U.9 and 10 (all included in F.1). These portions of F.1 look as though they were introduced to obscure at least some of Str. 1A-18-1st’s terraces; there is no clear sign that the summit was filled in at this time, however.

Stratum 3 and the lower, western extent of F.1 may have been introduced as part of a late effort to modify Str. 1A-18-1st’s form and access patterns. After their addition the building measured 20.02m east-west and its superstructure could have been accessed by passing up the eastern or western terraces. Possibly towards the end of this span two of the western and an equal number of eastern terraces were covered with a dense packing of stones set in earth (also parts of F.1). These rocks might have been placed in preparation for constructions that were never completed or as part of an effort to terminate the platform and obscure its form.

Time Span 4

Following abandonment, Str. 1A-18-1st was buried by the deposition of S.1 and 2. The latter, a moderately fine-textured, moderately loosely compacted, brown soil, covers construction by as much as 0.63m (where it overlies the U.3 floor on the east) and blankets F.1 off the platform’s west side. Stratum 1, a moderately fine-textured, moderately loosely compacted, root-rich, dark brown soil, buries S.2 by 0.1-0.17m. Embedded in S.1 and 2 is a moderately dense concentration of rocks dislodged from final-phase architecture (F.2). Feature 2 is densest where it overlies construction, though it is hard to distinguish from F.1 in these areas; east and west of the platform it declines in density within 1.6m and 0.5m of TS.2 architecture, respectively.

Structure 1A-100

Structure 1A-100 appeared on the surface as a square delimited by lines of stones set flush with ground level. It is situated 1.5m southwest of Str. 1A-18 and 3.5m northeast of Str. 1A-6. Structure 1A-100, in fact, fills up most of the space between Strs. 1A-18 and 1A-6, partially closing off the passage between the western La Sierra site core and the ballcourt. The terrain over which Str. 1A-100-1st was erected rises 0.23m over 5.9m from east to west. Digging here was conducted as part of Subop. 28D, clearing approximately 50m² in the course of exposing most of the edifice’s east and west flanks. Excavations were pursued to maximum depths of 0.55m and 0.53m below modern ground surface outside and within construction,

respectively. One building phase was recognized in the course of this work which was pursued for roughly two months in 1995 under the direction of Garrett Silliman.

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-100-1st	U.1-13	-	-	LCL III/II
2	Str. 1A-100-1st	-	-	F.1	LCL III/EPC
3	-	-	S.1, 2	F.2	-

Time Span 1

Structure 1A-100-1st is a low, stone-faced platform that fills most of the western La Sierra site core's southeast corner between Strs. 1A-18 and 1A-6. A white plaster floor fronts the edifice on the east (U.1) and west (U.10). Unit 1 extends 0.22m east of the edifice's east basal wall (U.2) while the extent of U.10 on the west is unknown. The basal eastern facing (U.2), on the side looking towards the ballcourt, rests on U.1 and rises 0.25m above it. The preserved segments of U.2 are fashioned almost exclusively of faced stone blocks. This wall was exposed for 8m north-south, turning corners to the west at its southern (joining with U.7) and northern ends (joining with U.13), and extending back and behind U.9 on the north. Unit 2's low height, falling 0.4m below the top of the platform, suggests that large segments of the wall were robbed for stones, almost certainly in antiquity.

Unit 2 corners to the west with U.7 about 3.55m north of the apparent southern end of the western basal wall (U.5). Preservation here is not good, but it appears that U.7 continues westward at least 1.2m before all sign of it is lost. If this reconstruction is correct, then Str. 1A-100-1st was L-shaped, narrowing to 4.9m across south of the U.7 corner.

Rising above the northern-most 1.8m of U.2 are two steps (U.3 and 4) the risers of which are made using masonry blocks. Unit 3, the lower of the steps, is 0.22m high by 0.38m wide while the next ascending riser, U.4, is 0.15m high and gives way to the summit. Fragments of white plaster grace the area between U.2 and 3 (U.11) and are found on U.3's tread (U.12). Though the southern edges of U.3 and 4 are unclear, it appears that they were not more than 1.8m long north-south.

Unit 5, at 0.39m high, is the western basal wall. Unit 5 was uncovered for a total distance of 11.55m north south, though its northern and southern termini are unclear. On the north U.5 may turn a corner to the east where it lines up tolerably well with U.13, the putative north basal wall. To the south U.5 either corners to the east at its putative junction with U.8, the possible southern basal wall, or continues for at least an additional 1m towards Str. 1A-6. Preservation was so poor in this area that we could not decide among these alternatives in the field.

The summit was only exposed in a 1m-wide swath running east-west. Though it may well have been paved with a mixture of stone and earth, no signs of wall foundations or built-in furniture were encountered.

Structure 1A-100-1st's fill consists primarily of a moderately coarse-textured brown soil in which is embedded a moderately dense concentration of small to medium-size river cobbles (U.6).

Unit 9 is a ca. 0.6m-high wall composed of cut blocks that abuts U.2 and runs 0.35m to the east where it intersects Str. 1A-18-1st's southwest corner (U.14 and 21). It appears that U.9 was introduced to seal off this narrow passage between the two edifices.

Structure 1A-100-1st is, by the end of TS.1, a 0.39m- and 0.62m-high (on the west and east, respectively), stone-faced, earth-and-stone-filled platform that covers 5.9m east-west (measured across the center) by about 11.55m north-south, and is aligned ca. 200 degrees. The building may narrow to 4.9m across over its southern-most 3.55m where the eastern basal facing (U.2) turns a corner with U.7 heading west. The earth-and-stone-paved summit was apparently reached by ascending a set of two steps that rose above the eastern basal facing. These risers were limited to the northern-most 1.8m of the platform, in its northeast corner. The preponderance of cut stone blocks in the eastern basal facing and steps suggests that this was the side intended for public view. The summit itself measured roughly 4.85m east-west by, very approximately, 8m north-south (38.8m²) and had no discernible foundations or furniture. Though we only cleared a limited portion of the summit, given the shallowness of the overburden (0.12m), it seems likely that any superstructure architecture would have been visible on the surface.

At some point in the platform's history the 0.35m-wide gap separating Strs. 1A-100-1st and 1A-18-1st was sealed by the construction of a cut block wall that abuts the former's northeast corner and connects it to the latter's southwest corner. It is unclear whether the space between Strs. 1A-100-1st and 1A-6 to the south was ever filled with construction.

Time Span 2

A dense concentration of cobbles apparently sealed Str. 1A-100-1st's east face (F.1). That these stones were introduced after the blocks making up U.2 were robbed implies that F.1's deposition took place after Str. 1A-100-1st was no longer being used but still stood open. The west flank was apparently not covered in this manner nor was the summit blanketed by fill.

Time Span 3

Following Str. 1A-100-1st's abandonment, the structure was almost completely covered by the accumulation of S.1 and 2. The latter is a moderately coarse-textured brown soil that collected to as much as 0.39m over construction and was blanketed, in turn, by 0.08-0.11m of S.1, a moderately fine-textured, root-rich, dark brown soil. Embedded in S.1 and 2 are a few scattered stones fallen from final-phase architecture (F.2). There is a slight tendency for these rocks to be concentrated over the platform itself, though they are dispersed at least 0.54m east and 0.2m west of Str. 1A-100-1st. The paucity of tumbled architectural debris implies that Str. 1A-100-1st never stood much taller than its extant height nor did it support a substantial superstructure made of stones.

Chronological Summary

There is slight evidence, in the form of a few diagnostic sherds mixed with later material,

of a small or ephemeral occupation in the area of Str. 1A-100-1st during Late Classic I. There are no occupation levels and construction clearly assignable to Late Classic II though Str. 1A-18-1st seems to have been raised near the end of this span, at the Late Classic II/III transition. Its near neighbor, Str. 1A-100-1st, may well have been erected somewhat later, either at the very end of Late Classic II or early in Late Classic III. Both edifices were apparently in use during the first part of Late Classic III but had been abandoned by the end of that interval. At least portions of both constructions were sealed by a fill consisting of a mix of cobbles and earth by the conclusion of Late Classic III if not somewhat earlier. The few Early Postclassic sherds recovered mixed with Late Classic III diagnostics on and around Strs. 1A-18-1st and 1A-100-1st imply continued, late use of both buildings. The diminutive size of the Early Postclassic sample, however, points to the presence of relatively few people at this time, an occupation of limited duration, or both. No construction is clearly dated to the Early Postclassic in Op. 28.