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Ballcourt Area Excavations: Operation 30 and Suboperations 27A, F, H, and I

The ballcourt area encompasses four buildings (Str. 1A-24, 50/52) and two features (F.1 and 11) spread out over ca. 6,400m² on the south edge of La Sierra's site core. Structures 1A-50 and 1A-51 define the east and west sides of a ball court, F.11, a low wall, closes off the court's south end, and Str. 1A-52 lies 10m off the southeast corner of Str. 1A-50. Structure 1A-24 and F.1 are about 3m west of Str. 1A-51. These constructions are bordered on the south by a steep, 2.5m-high ascent to the summit of the upper terrace that bounds the site core on the south. Initial digging in Op. 30 was directed by Dr. John Henderson of Cornell University in 1977 (Henderson et al. 1979). He and his crew investigated the range structure that defines the ball court's west side, Str. 1A-51 (ibid.:183); our work was intended to extend and amplify Dr. Henderson's pioneering efforts. Subsequent excavations pursued in Op. 30 were conducted in two phases. The first, in 1988, was directed by Patricia Reed and Patricia Whooley and cleared 104.2m² on Strs. 1A-50, 1A-51, and F.11. Structure 1A-52 and a low terrace lying immediately to the south were investigated during 1995 by Amanda Moser, resulting in the exposure of 80m². Lisa Collins oversaw excavations into Str. 1A-24 and the terrace that bounds the ballcourt zone on the south (part of Op.27), uncovering 42.9m² in 1988. Overall, 227.1m² were cleared in Op.27 and 30 during the 1988 and 1995 field seasons.

Structure 1A-24

Structure 1A-24 lies roughly 3m west of Str. 1A-51, roughly in line with the latter's north face. Excavations here were restricted to a 1m-wide trench (Subop. 27F) that cut across the platform east-to-west. A total of 10.9m² was cleared in this suboperation, digging being carried down to maximum depths of 1.12m and 0.7m below modern ground surface outside and within architecture, respectively. One construction phase was defined in the course of this work directed by Lisa Collins for about three weeks in 1988.

Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.3	-	LPrecl.?
2	Str. 1A-24-Sub1	U.1	-	-	LCL II/I
3	-	-	S.2	-	LCL II
4	Str. 1A-24-1st	U.2-8	-	-	LCL II
5	Str. 1A-24-1st	U.9	-	-	LCL II/III
6	-	-	S.1, 2	F.1	

Time Span 1

Stratum 3, a moderately fine-textured, moderately hard-compacted, tan soil, accumulated to a depth of at least 0.35m during this span (its base was not encountered). This soil level was encountered lying beneath TS.4 construction (U.8) on Str. 1A-24-1st's east side and maintained a level surface over the 2.18m it was exposed running east-west.

Time Span 2

During this interval a low (ca. 0.1m high) but broad (0.98m across) construction (U.1) was raised. Unit 1 is fashioned of sizable river cobbles and may be part of a floor or a foundation that supported a perishable upper wall within a surface-level building (Str. 1A-24-Sub1). The relationship between U.1 and S.3 was not revealed, though U.1's construction clearly predates Str. 1A-24-1st's erection; the latter's eastern terrace (U.2) sits 0.28m above U.1. Unit 1 is aligned approximately 335 degrees.

Time Span 3

Following Str. 1A-24-Sub1's abandonment, ca. 0.2m of a moderately hard-compacted, brown soil with numerous included artifacts and small pebbles (S.2) was laid down. Though S.2 was uncovered off Str. 1A-24-1st's east and west sides, that portion laid down during TS.3 was only noted on the east where it blankets U.1. The presence of cultural material in S.2 indicates a human presence in the area while the earth was accumulating.

Time Span 4

Structure 1A-24-1st is a stone-faced platform that is faced by one terrace on the east. On the west the ascent to the summit is direct. The basal eastern terrace (U.2) is 0.42m high, 3.03m wide, and was surfaced with earth. Unit 2 terminates on the west at a 0.24m-high stone-faced riser (U.3) that gives way to the summit. On the west a 0.2m-high basal facing (U.6) fronts a 0.7m-wide surface that ends at the back (west side) of U.4, the summit bench. Unit 6's tread was apparently surfaced with a mixture of stones and earth.

The summit looks to have been surfaced with a combination of earth and stone above which stood a 0.57m-high, stone-faced bench (U.4). Unit 4 is made with a mixture of cobbles and cut blocks, the latter being concentrated towards the preserved top of the bench on its east face. The bench is 1.94m wide east-west and is located 1.92m west of the eastern summit step-up (U.3).

The fill backing U.3 and contained with U.4 (U.7 and 4, respectively) consists of densely packed stones set in a brown earth matrix. Unit 8, the fill retained by the basal eastern terrace facing (U.2), consists of a moderately hard-compacted brown earth containing only a few scattered small cobbles.

By the conclusion of TS. 4, Str. 1A-24-1st was a stone-faced, stone-and-earth-filled platform standing 0.67m high on the east and 0.2m high on the west. This height discrepancy suggests that the platform was raised over a 0.51m-high east-to-west ascent. The edifice measures 7.6m east-west and is oriented roughly 335 degrees. One terrace on the east leads up to a summit which encompasses 3.86m across. Much of the summit's earth-and-stone-floored surface is taken up by a 0.57m-high stone-faced bench that is 1.94m wide. This construction

looks east over the platform's broad (3.03m wide) eastern terrace towards the ballcourt.

Time Span 5

At some point in Str. 1A-24-1st's history U.9, a moderately hard-compacted tan earth fill, was deposited against the platform's west flank. Introduction of U.9, 0.36m thick at this point, covered U.6, the western basal facing, and left 0.35m of the U.4 bench still visible on this side. No comparable in-filling was recorded on the east. Though Str. 1A-24-1st retained its earlier orientation, it no longer stood above the newly raised extramural ground surface on the west and measured 6.9m across east-west. The bench and eastern terraces apparently remained in use now.

Time Span 6

Following abandonment, deposition of S.2 resumed, eventually burying all but the uppermost 0.11m of U.4 on the west and 0.18m of U.2 on the east. Blanketing S.2 and all but the highest elements of construction is S.1, a moderately hard-compacted, root-rich, dark brown soil. Embedded in S.1 and upper S.2 is a moderately dense concentration of rocks fallen from final-phase architecture (F.1). Feature 1 is densest where it overlies Str. 1A-24-1st's summit (from U.3 on the east and over U.4), the frequency of tumbled stones dropping off markedly east and west of this construction. Nevertheless, elements of F.1 were still noted 1.73m east and 1.47m west of Str. 1A-24-1st architecture.

Structure 1A-50

Structure 1A-50 defines the east side of the ballcourt whose western flank is delimited by Str. 1A-51, 9.8m distant in that direction. Feature 11 is roughly 9m south of Str. 1A-50 while Str. 1A-52 lies 15m to the southeast. Digging here consisted of a trench that extended completely across the platform's north end (Subop. 30B and G) complemented by more limited exposures designed to reveal the edifice's north flank (Subop. 30A) and southeast corner (Subop. 30J). All-in-all, 46m² were exposed here during the course of approximately one-and-a-half months in 1988, digging being carried to maximum depths of 1.1m and 1.68m below modern ground surface outside and within architecture, respectively. One principal construction phase was revealed in the course of this work which was overseen by Patricia Whooley and Patricia Reed.

Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.3, 4	-	
2	Str. 1A-50-1st	U.1-14	-	-	LCL II/III?
3	Str. 1A-50-1st	U.15-17	-	-	LCL III/II?

4	Str. 1A-50-1st	-	S.3	F.1, 2	LCL III/II?
5	-	-	S.1, 2	F.3	

Time Span 1

Deposition of S.4, a moderately coarse-textured, hard-compacted, tan soil with many small (1cm or less in diameter) rock inclusions, is the first activity attested to in Str. 1A-50-1st's environs. This earth layer is, minimally, 0.17m thick (its base was not encountered) and rises 0.06m over 3.34m from west-to-east where it was exposed west of the platform. Stratum 4 was not encountered at comparable depths east of Str. 1A-50-1st, implying that the original ground surface dropped down to the east. Comparing the relative elevations of Str. 1A-50-1st's basal constructions on the east and west supports this notion, the ground rising 0.4m across 12.3m east-to-west. Blanketing S.4 by 0.15-0.21m (on the west) is a fine-textured, hard-compacted, tan soil (S.3). Stratum 3 underlies TS. 2 construction on the east and west.

Time Span 2

Most of what we define as Str. 1A-50-1st was raised at this time. The west, or alley-facing side, of the edifice is delimited by a vertical wall (U.1) that rises 0.34m above the ancient earthen playing alley (S.3's top). Unit 1 is fashioned of dressed masonry blocks laid in four courses and is 0.6m wide. Unit 2 succeeds U.1 on the east, rising 0.36m above its predecessor. This construction is made of cobbles, measures 1.22m across, and retains a fill composed of densely packed small to large cobbles set in a fine-textured, hard-compacted, tan soil identical to S.3 (U.3). Capping the U.3 fill is a 0.02m-thick level of fragmentary, soft, lime plaster (U.4). Unit 4 slopes up 0.31m over 1.86m from where it originates 0.42m east of U.2 to its intersection with U.5 on the east. Unit 5, in turn, rises 0.36m over U.4 and is the cobble facing for a terrace that is 0.43m wide east-west. Unit 6 ascends 0.37m above U.5's stone tread and gives way to the summit. Measuring 0.49m across, U.6, like its predecessors, is fashioned of unmodified river cobbles.

Little more than a 1m-wide (north-south) swath of the summit was revealed in Subop. 30B and G. Unit 7, the first element of superstructure construction encountered on the west, is a line of cut blocks set flush with the top of U.6. It is unclear whether U.7 is the upper stone of a much taller facing that was buried by the construction of U.5 and 6 or part of the western border of the summit floor or both. Unit 8, a 0.41m-high by 1.14m-wide cobble wall, appears to be the superstructure's western foundation. An 0.08m-high stone step-out projects 0.12m west of U.8's base, extending to the back (east side) of U.7. Unit 8's considerable width hints that it may have doubled as both a footing for perishable upper construction and a bench. A stone-floor (U.15) extends 2.04m east from U.8 to the back (west side) of U.12, the eastern stone summit step-up.

The basal eastern terrace facing (U.9) is a 0.25m-high by 0.6m-wide construction composed of a course of large cut blocks laid atop a foundation of small cobbles. Unit 10, though poorly preserved, rose an estimated 1.2m in a single, steep ascent above U.9. Fashioned of unmodified river cobbles, U.10's riser fronts a terrace tread that is 1.72m wide. Unit 11 defines this tread's west end where it stands 0.48m above that earth-and-stone surface and extends back 0.61m where it is succeeded by U.12. Unit 12 originally stood an estimated 0.61m above the U.10 terrace tread, though all but 0.13m of this riser was eventually covered by the

addition of U.11 to the east (see below). Unit 12 is capped by a course of masonry blocks resting on a cobble foundation.

Unit 13 is Str. 1A-50-1st's northern basal wall. It stood to a preserved height of ca. 0.5m and consisted of four courses of cut blocks. Unit 14, the southern basal facing, is built in a comparable fashion but was only exposed to a height of 0.14m.

By the conclusion of TS. 2, Str. 1A-50-1st was a stone-faced platform that stood 2.05m tall on the east and 1.65m high on the west, measured 12.3m across east-west by 28.75m north-south, and was aligned roughly 165 degrees. The west, alley-facing, side is mounted by two low terraces that give way, after 2.24m, to a sloping zone consisting of a thin white plaster layer capping a fill of earth and stones. This ascending surface is succeeded by two more low risers that lead to a stone-paved summit. The east and west summit limits are marked by lines of cut blocks; on the west these stones seem to be set flush with the floor while on the east they comprise the summit step-up. A 1.14m-wide cobble wall is likely part of the superstructure's western foundation and may, given its girth, have doubled as a bench. No signs of an eastern footing were recorded and the summit construction may have been open in this direction where it overlooked three terraces the second riser of which is 1.2m high. The basal facings on all sides of Str. 1A-50-1st were made of cut blocks; on the west, north, and south these dressed stones are the sole material used while on the east cut blocks rest atop a cobble foundation. The remaining walls, save for U.7 and 12, are fashioned using unmodified river cobbles.

Time Span 3

During this interval two stone-faced terraces (U.16/18) were added on the building's northwest corner, projecting 1.37m west into the alley. The basal riser in this sequence, U.17, is 0.25m high by 0.72m wide and is succeeded on the east by U.18. The latter stands 0.15m above U.17's tread and extends 0.65m back to U.1, the basal western facing in TS.2. Unit 16 is the east-west running wall that defines the projection's south side; the U.17 and 18 terrace were traced for 2.7m (U.17) and 3.75m (U.18) to the north where they stopped without a clear resolution. Units 17 and 18 are made of cut blocks while U.16 was fashioned using a combination of one large river cobble and two very crudely shaped blocks. Units 17 and 18 roughly parallel U.1.

At about the same time U.11 was added to the eastern terrace sequence. This cobble construction rises 0.48m above the U.10 terrace and runs back 0.63m to the west where it intersects, and buries most of, U.12; the latter still projects 0.13m above U.11. The addition of U.11 made for four terraces on Str. 1A-50-1st's east side, reducing the tread of the second ascending riser (U.10) to 1.09m.

The architectural significance of U.16/18 is unclear. Their addition to Str. 1A-50-1st's west face would have narrowed the northern 3.75m of the playing alley by 1.37m. A comparable projection may have extended into the alley from the northeast corner of the neighboring Str. 1A-51-1st (F.1). Together these subtly expressed architectural elements seemingly narrowed the northernmost 2.65-3.75m of the alley to 7m across east-west. Though U.16/18 were poorly preserved, this especially being the case for U.17, their failure to resolve on the north may imply that they were never finished.

Time Span 4

During this span portions of Str. 1A-50-1st were covered with a dense deposit of small to large stones set in a fine-textured, hard-compacted, tan to brown soil (F.1 and 2). Feature 1 covers U.9 and 10 on the platform's east flank, extending 1.3m east of U.9, the basal facing on this side. Though some of the stones making up F.1 are tilting down to the east away from the building, most were found lying flat but with no clear construction bounding them on the east. Deposition of F.1 apparently contributed to the excellent state of preservation in which U.9 was found but did not act to maintain the architectural integrity of U.10. Possibly, U.10 had already collapsed or been dismantled before the F.1 stones were introduced. Roughly 0.2m of S.3 covers U.9 by this point; either this soil was introduced as a bedding for F.1 or was allowed to accumulate by natural means prior to the depositing of the F.1 rocks.

On the west, F.2 blankets the U.4 floor, U.5, and the U.7 stone line by 0.34-0.47m. As with F.1, most of the stones in F.2 were lying horizontally as though they had been placed, not fallen to, where they were found. Features 1 and 2 may be fill laid down in anticipation of expanding Str. 1A-50-1st, a program of renovations that was never completed. Alternatively, these stones might be the most physically prominent part of a campaign to bury at least portions of Str. 1A-50-1st, thus terminating its use.

Time Span 5

Following the abandonment of Str. 1A-50-1st, about 0.3m of a fine-textured, hard-compacted, brown soil (S.2), gradually accumulated over S.3 and the lower portions of construction. Stratum 2 was eventually capped by S.1, a fine-textured, hard-compacted, dark brown-to-gray, root-rich soil that is 0.09-0.18m thick. Embedded in S.1 and 2 is a moderately dense concentration of rocks fallen from final-phase architecture (F.3). Feature 3 is difficult to distinguish from F.1 and 2, but seems to be somewhat denser overlying construction and ends rapidly off Str. 1A-50-1st's flanks.

Structure 1A-51

Structure 1A-51 forms the western side of the ballcourt, lying 9.8m west of its eastern counterpart, Str. 1A-50. Structure 1A-24 is a scant 3m to the west while F.11 is 13m to the south. The terrain on which Str. 1A-51 was erected is relatively flat. Excavations of Str. 1A-51 in 1988 were restricted to three trenches (Subop. 30C, K, and L) designed to locate the platform's northeast, northwest, and southeast corners, respectively. These clearing operations exposed roughly 34m² and were intended to expand on the trench Dr. Henderson excavated in 1977 east-west from the alley to the platform's summit (Henderson et al. 1979). Digging was carried down in 1988 to a maximum depth of 1.1m below modern ground surface outside construction. Architectural fill was not probed nor was any portion of the summit cleared in 1988. The investigation of Str. 1A-51 was directed by Patricia Whooley and Patricia Reed for approximately one-and-a-half months in 1988.

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	Str. 1A-51-1st	U.1-3	-	-	LCL II/III, LPrecl
2	Str. 1A-51-1st	U.4-6	F.1	-	LCL III/II
3	Str. 1A-51-1st	-	-	F.2	LCL III/II
4	-	-	S.1	F.3	

Time Span 1

Structure 1A-51-1st's north, east, and south basal facing were uncovered. The eastern, alley-facing riser stands 0.73m high (in its best-preserved southern exposure) and is built exclusively of faced masonry (U.1). The manner in which the stones are set varies across U.1. Over the southern-most uncovered 4.1m the basal course consists of cut blocks set on end and surmounted by three surviving courses of flat-laid, faced stones. The northern-most 4.25m of U.1 revealed in Subop. 30C is fashioned exclusively of flat-laid blocks. Structure 1A-51-1st's northern basal facing (U.2) is also fashioned of largely of masonry blocks, though this time mixed with medium-size river cobbles near its putative northwest corner. The northern basal riser was exposed in two discontinuous segments 7.25m apart at heights ranging from 0.14-0.2m. Unit 2's component stones were falling out northwards away from the building when uncovered, however, and it almost certainly once stood much higher. The northwest corner of Str. 1A-51-1st was not encountered and its approximate location is inferred to be equivalent to the western-most preserved segment of U.2. The 0.9m of the southern basal wall (U.3) revealed at its junction with U.1 is built in the same manner as the southern portion of the latter construction; i.e., a basal course of faced blocks set on end supports several courses of flat-laid cut stones.

By the conclusion of TS. 1, Str. 1A-51-1st was a stone faced platform that measured approximately 13.65m east-west by 29.15m north-south and was oriented ca. 165 degrees. Its east, alley-facing side, was seemingly made exclusively of cut blocks that, in the north, were laid flat while in the south a basal level of stones set on end supports several courses of horizontally lying faced rocks. The northern basal riser is made using a mix of cobbles and cut blocks, though the latter predominate, all of which are flat-laid. On the south, the small exposed portion of the basal wall matches the construction style noted in the southern portion of its eastern counterpart; i.e., vertically-set blocks acting as a base for flat-laid cut stones.

Dr. Henderson's excavations revealed a profile of Str. 1A-51-1st's alley-facing side that closely parallels that revealed on Str. 1-50-1st (Henderson et al. 1979:183). The basal riser gives way to a sloping zone surfaced with faced blocks that ascends gradually from east-to-west for 10m. Parts of this sloping surface may have been covered with white plaster. Plaster was also noted blanketing that portion of the playing alley exposed next to the basal riser. This final version seems to have been preceded by two to three earlier construction episodes. No sign of the plaster-surfaced playing alley was recorded in 1988 but this layer is likely variably preserved and may well have not survived in the areas we investigated.

Time Span 2

During this interval a 0.3m-high stone-faced outset (U.4-6) was appended to Str. 1A-51-

1st's north flank. This construction measures 10.35m east-west and projects 1.5m north from U.2, the northern basal facing. Units 4-6, the east, north, and west perimeter walls of this addition, are made from a combination of medium to large river cobbles and cut blocks with the unfaced stones in the majority. Though poorly preserved, the U.4-6 addition is aligned roughly 268 degrees.

Another construction (F.1), this time fashioned of flat-lying cut blocks and cobbles, may also have been added off Str. 1A-51-1st's east face at this time. Feature 1 is roughly 0.1m high by 2.65m long north-south, intersects U.1 ca. 0.35m south of its northeast corner, and projects at least 1.8m eastward into the alley. So badly preserved is F.1 that its architectural integrity is questionable. Nevertheless, if part of purposeful construction, F.1 may be analogous to the U.16-18 addition to Str. 1A-50-1st. These two projections may have narrowed the northern 2.65-3.75m of the alley to 7m across.

Structure 1A-51-1st's core remained essentially untouched, the primary changes to the building now consisting of low, stone-faced additions appended to its north and, possibly, northeast sides.

Time Span 3

Dense concentrations of cobbles set in an earth matrix (F.2) were recorded off Str. 1A-51-1st's north and south flanks. As we did not excavate the platform's upper portions we cannot say how well they are preserved and whether they might be the sources of the F.2 rocks. *If* Str. 1A-51-1st's situation is analogous to that recorded on neighboring Str. 1A-50-1st, however, it may be that F.2 represents an effort to bury at least the edifice's basal southern and northern facings under a deposit of earth-and-stone. That the northern facing (U.2) was found falling out to the north implies that F.2, whatever its origin and significance, was introduced after this portion of the building was already in an advanced state of decay.

Time Span 4

After abandonment, Str. 1A-51-1st was covered by a moderately fine-textured, hard compacted, brown soil (S.1) that grows darker and richer in organic matter as it approaches modern ground surface. Embedded within this earth is a moderately dense concentration of stones tumbled from final-phase architecture (F.3). The latter declines in density with increasing distance from construction.

Structure 1A-52

Structure 1A-52 is a monumental platform lying ca. 4m southeast of F.11 on the southeast corner of the ballcourt zone. A north-to-south drop in the terrain beginning 8.2m south of the edifice hinted at the presence of a terrace in this area analogous to F.11 (see below). Investigation of Str. 1A-52 and the putative southern terrace was conducted as part of Subop. 30AA, AB, AC, AD, AE, and AF. A 34.25m-long trench was dug across the platform running roughly north-south, the line of this excavation continuing after an unexcavated 3.2m to intersect the presumed terrace more-or-less perpendicularly. Clearing along portions of Str. 1A-52-1st's base and across the northern summit was undertaken to reconstruct the building's basal dimensions and the nature of superstructure architecture. Overall, roughly 80m² were cleared

on and around Str. 1A-52-1st, digging being carried to maximum depths of 1.42m and 1.87m below modern ground surface outside and within architecture, respectively. One major construction phase was recognized in the course of this work which was directed for roughly two months in 1995 by Amanda Moser.

Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.3	-	MPrecl.?
2	Str. 1A-52-Sub1 Str. 1A-52-Sub2	U.1, 2 U.1	-	-	LCL II/I
3	-	-	S.3, 6, 7	-	LCL II
4	Str. 1A-52-1st	U.1-11, 16-23, 25, 26	-	-	LCL II/III
5	Str. 1A-52-1st	U.13-15, 24	-	-	LCL III/II
6	Str. 1A-52-1st	U.12	-	F.1, 2	LCL III, EPC
7	-	-	S.1, 2, 4, 5	F.3	

Time Span 1

Deposition of S.3, a fine-textured, very hard-compacted, tan clay mottled with black clay, is the earliest activity attested to in Str. 1A-52-1st's environs. At least 0.1m of this soil was deposited now, underlying the basal southern facing of Str. 1A-52-Sub1 (U.1). The base of S.3 was not encountered in our excavations.

Time Span 2

Str. 1A-52-Sub1's erection interrupted the accumulation of S.3. The 1m-wide portion of this platform's south flank which was uncovered in our excavations lies 1.29m north of Str. 1A-52-1st. This limited exposure indicates that Str. 1A-52-Sub1 was a 0.4m-high stone-faced platform faced on the south by a single ascent (U.1) to its stone-floored summit (U.2). The building is aligned roughly 72 degrees.

Structure 1A-52-Sub2 was exposed in the north end of the trench cut into the supposed southern terrace which was thought to be about 12.2m south of Str. 1A-52-1st. Though we cannot establish that Str. 1A-52-Sub1 and -Sub2 are contemporary, their analogous stratigraphic positions at levels beneath later construction tentatively suggest this conclusion. The sole uncovered segment of Str. 1A-52-Sub2 is a 0.32m-high by 0.82m-wide stone wall (U.1). Unit 1 looks like the southern foundation for a surface-level building that probably continued

northward, though its dimensions are unknown. Not enough of U.1 was uncovered to infer its orientation.

Time Span 3

Stratum 3 resumed deposition in TS.3, approximately 0.4m of this soil now being introduced. This accumulation buried all but the U.2 floor that previously capped Str. 1A-52-Sub1. It may well be, therefore, that an undetermined section of stone pavement remained exposed 1.29m north of Str. 1A-52-1st when that platform was in use. By the end of TS.3, S.3 apparently rose about 0.4m over 14.74m north-to-south before dropping 0.2m over 0.8m in that direction. As S.3 was only exposed in three discontinuous segments in our excavations we cannot be sure about what the terrain it defined looked like. It does appear, however, that Str. 1A-52-1st was built atop a low rise, S.3 in this area seemingly reaching its peak somewhere beneath the core of that platform. Stratum 3 was not encountered in our excavations into the southern terrace.

On the south, Str.1A-52-Sub2 was blanketed by as much as 0.46m of S.6, a coarse-textured, moderately hard-compacted, tan sand (the layer's base was not found). Stratum 6 ascends 0.98m over 3m from south-to-north but does not reappear in excavations 3.2m to the north (this 3.2m block was not dug). It is unclear whether S.6 accumulated by natural means or was introduced purposefully to bury Str. 1A-52-Sub2. As a cultural source for the earth layer is not evident, it retains its designation as a stratum.

North of Str. 1A-52-Sub2, S.6 overlies a moderately coarse-textured, moderately hard-compacted, tan clay (S.7). Stratum 7 contains numerous medium to small cobbles and is at least 0.28m thick (its base lies beyond excavation limits). This layer pinches out against S.6 on the south 0.37m north of Str. 1A-52-Sub2's U.1 and rises 0.22m over 0.06m before leveling off for the remainder of the 0.9m it was followed northward.

Time Span 4

Structure 1A-52-1st is a stone-faced platform that was ascended by four terraces on the north and three on the south; two eastern terraces (U.17 and 18) and the basal western terrace (U.19) were exposed but we do not know how many risers once graced these flanks. The two lowest northern terraces (U.16 and 5) are 0.3m and 0.37m high and 1.42m and 1.26m wide. Unit 16, the basal terrace facing, rests atop S.3 and runs ca. 6.5m to the east before stepping out 0.3m to the north and resuming its eastward run. The, minimally, 5.1m long (east-west) length of the northern projection's north face is composed almost exclusively of cut blocks; a marked contrast to U.16's cobble construction to the west. A cobble pavement (U.26) runs back between U.16 and 5 at the point where the basal terrace steps north. This floor was uncovered over an east-west dimension of no more than 0.5m and was not revealed in further explorations of U.16 and 5, 2.85m to the east. The third riser (U.6) is of comparable height to U.16 and 5 (0.35m) but is somewhat wider (1.97m across). Both U.5 and 6 seem to have been made using a mixture of cobbles (primarily) and a few cut blocks; the latter seem to be more prevalent in the eastern exposed portions of the risers where they back the U.16 northern outset. This concentration of masonry on the outset (U.16) and in the two backing terraces hints at the importance attributed to this portion of the edifice by its builders; possibly it functioned as an outset staircase facing north towards the ballcourt.

Unit 7, the next ascending terrace, stands 0.71m above the U.6 tread but extends down 1.25m below that point. The relatively great height of U.7, reaching at least 1.96m in all, suggests that it was the platform's northern core wall against which U.5, 6, and 16 were built (efforts to find U.7's base ended before achieving that objective). A deposit of fine-textured, loosely compacted, tan soil (U.20) is piled against U.7's base to a height of 0.23m (though U.20's bottom was not found). Unit 20 drops 0.22m over 0.34m south-to-north away from U.7. As U.20 cuts into S.3 at this point it looks as though it marks the edge of a narrow trench dug into the earlier soil to set the foundation for U.7. Once the wall was raised those parts of the footing trench still open were filled with U.20. Unit 7 runs back 1.54m where it is succeeded by U.8, a 0.27m-high stone-faced ascent to the summit.

On the south a 0.16m-high by 0.29m-wide wall (U.1) made from a mix of cut blocks and cobbles is set 0.16m into S.3. It leads, on the south, to a much higher (0.66m), steep stone-faced ascent (U.2). Unit 2's tread runs 1.6m to the south where it is succeeded by U.3, a 0.3m-high by 1.27m-wide terrace. This construction, in turn, gives way to U.4, the 0.65m-high ascent to the summit.

Three 0.33-0.47-high by 0.2-0.35m-wide risers were noted in limited excavations on the platform's southwest corner (U.22, 23, and 25). These constructions may be part of a staircase that ascended Str. 1A-52-1st's southwest flank leading to the summit. As U.22, 23, and 25 do not line up with architecture exposed in the principal north-south trench to the east it is likely that the steps did not continue all the way across this side of Str. 1A-52-1st. Unit 2 is preserved at 0.57m high at its southwest corner where it fronts U.22, 23, and 25. It does not line up with its counterpart 2.6m to the east in the main north-south trench. As we did not connect these exposures we cannot say how the architecture they contain might have articulated. Just as the basal northern facing, U.16, does not continue straight across the building it seems that its southern counterpart may also have stepped out, this time an estimated 0.65m to the south.

The basal eastern wall (U.17) stands a preserved 0.69m high while its western counterpart (U.19) is an extant 0.58m tall. The second ascending terrace on the east (U.18) is an estimated 2.35m west of U.17 and rises 0.2m above the latter's tread. Preservation of U.18 was sufficiently poor that its precise location and height remain uncertain.

We were able to expose only a small portion of the summit. What we did clear revealed a stone-and-earth surface that measures 3.93m across north-south and at least 9m east-west (the eastern, but not the western, end of the enclosure was found). The 9m² excavated on the summit did not reveal any room-dividers or built-in furniture. If the former did not exist, and we cannot rule them out at this point, then Str. 1A-52-1st's superstructure consisted of one large open room covering 35.4m². The summit was likely reached by a formal outset staircase ascending the north side and, possibly, a more limited set of steps located on Str.1A-52-1st's southwest corner.

The fill immediately underlying the northern and southern terraces consists of densely packed cobbles set in a brown clay (U.21). The deepest sequence of fill deposits was exposed within 0.76m of U.7. Here, overlying S.3 and U.20 is a ca. 0.5m-deep deposit of moderately coarse textured, moderately hard-compacted, tan soil with a few included medium-size cobbles set near the base (U.9). A 0.07m-thick lens of dark black clay mottled with tan soil (U.10) extends 0.55m into U.9, 0.35m above the latter's base. Overlying U.9 is U.11, a 0.5m-thick deposit of moderately coarse-textured, hard-compacted, tan soil. Unit 21 then caps this sequence, underlying the U.6 terrace tread.

By the end of TS.4, Structure 1A-52-1st was a 1.7m (on the south) to 1.94m high (on the

north) stone-faced platform that measured 13.7m north-south (including the outsets) by 19.1m east-west and was oriented ca. 87 degrees. The building rises above earthen surfaces on all sides, though a segment of stone flooring (U.2, the former summit of Str. 1A-52-Sub1) may still have been exposed flush with ground level 1.29m north of the platform near its northwest corner. This surface measured at least 1.85m north-south, though its full extent was not revealed. Five stone-faced risers mounted the north face while four ascended the south. The basal northern and southern risers step out 0.3m and 0.65m to the north and south, respectively, near the platform's center. These slight outsets are roughly symmetrical; not enough of the east and west basal facings were revealed to determine whether they enjoyed similar embellishments. The summit may have consisted of one large (35.4m²) earth-and-stone-floored enclosure. Though no room dividers or built-in furniture was revealed in excavations, our limited exposures do not rule out the existence of such constructions. Str. 1A-52-1st's terraces tend to be unusually wide by Naco standards. All but one of the uncovered northern and southern terraces measured between 1.26-1.97m across (the exception is U.1 which, at 0.29m wide, is more of a basal outset to U.2 than a full-fledged terrace). Such spacious terraces would have provided ample spaces for activities conducted outside the fairly large area encompassed by the superstructure room.

Most of Str. 1A-52-1st's exposed walls are fashioned using river cobbles while its fill is a mix of cobbles and earth. The exceptions are largely concentrated on the north face in the area of the basal terrace's (U.16) north projection. The outset's facing is fashioned exclusively of masonry blocks while similarly faced rocks are recorded in the next two terraces (U.6 and 5) that ascend above U.16 towards the summit. Such selective used of shaped stones implies that the area defined by U.16's northern projection held some special significance for its builders; possibly it functioned as a staircase that is at least 5.1m wide east-west. A narrower and more informal set of steps ascends the platform's southwest corner.

Time Span 5

Three steps (U.13-15) were added now to Str. 1A-52-1st, projecting 1.17m south from U.2 on the platform's south face. These constructions were fashioned using a mix of cobbles and schist slabs; in two cases the slabs capped the risers (U.13 and 14) while in the third instance the slab served as the foundation for a cobble facing (U.15). Though poorly reserved, the U.13-15 steps each rose 0.15-0.4m high, the basal ascent (U.13) being the tallest. Their treads measure 0.31-0.46m across and were apparently surfaced with stone. The staircase abuts U.2, 0.39m of which still protruded above the addition; U.2, therefore, was likely converted into the fourth step. Units 13-15 bury U.1, rest on, and rise above, S.3, and are underlain by a fill composed of medium to small cobbles set in a brown earth matrix (U.24). Unit 24 rides over the top of S.3 which is ascending south-to-north in this area (see TS.3). The construction of U.13-15 strongly suggests that the summit could now be reached via Str. 1A-52-1st's south side. There is no evidence that the northern stairs were abandoned nor is it clear that the southwest steps ceased to be used. Units 13-15, therefore, seem to be part of an effort to facilitate passage to the summit by creating another formal staircase that mirrors the earlier northern access feature. The southwest steps might have continued to function as an informal means of reaching the superstructure. That the U.13-15 staircase covers U.1 does indicate that these risers were a relatively late addition.

The TS. 5 renovations expanded Str. 1A-52-1st's north-south width to 14.87m and created a formal access feature on the south. This staircase has four risers (including the still-

visible top of U.2), was constructed using a mix of schist slabs and cobbles, and projected 1.17m south from the platform's south basal terrace (represented by U.2). Beyond adding the U.13-15 stairs there is little sign of modification to the edifice at this time.

Time Span 6

This interval is marked by the deposition of considerable quantities of earth and stone over large portions of Str. 1A-52-1st's exposed architecture. One of the first stages in this process was the laying down of U.12, a fine-textured, loosely consolidated, tan soil containing a moderately dense concentration of cobbles. Unit 12 closely resembles fill that undergirds TS.4 architecture and its presence overlying parts of U.2-4 on the platform's south side may reflect less purposeful deposition than outwash of underlying fill as earlier terraces deteriorated. Units 3 and 4, in particular, were badly preserved when encountered suggesting that: U.12 may have originally underlain these constructions; and, by the time they were covered by F.1 (see below) the aforementioned terraces were already in an advanced state of decay.

Feature 1 is a very dense concentration of small to large cobbles set in a moderately coarse-textured, moderately soft-compacted, brown-to-gray clay. This deposit blankets the summit as well as all flanking terraces by as much as 1m and extends north and south of construction by 0.68m and 1.79m, respectively. On the south, an even denser concentration of cobbles set in a comparable matrix overlies Str. 1A-52-Sub2 (F.2). Feature 2 is a massive cobble deposit extending 9.22m north-south and ranging in exposed depth between 0.32m where it pinches out on the south to 1m at its maximum thickness towards the center. The base of F.2 was not exposed in all areas though it clearly rests on and rides over S.6, the earth layer that slopes up south-to-north above U.1 of Str. 1A-52-Sub2. In fact, this cobble-and-earth deposit ends where S.7 pinches out against S.6 on the north.

The rocks comprising F.1 and 2 are, by-and-large, flat laid and do not seem to represent tumbled debris from final-phase architecture. In the case of F.2, there is no known construction from which these rocks could have reasonably fallen. It is hard to escape the conclusion, therefore, that F.1 and 2 were purposefully laid in the positions where they were found. Adding to this impression is the presence of what seems to be a fill-retaining wall embedded in F.2. This subtly expressed construction is 0.63m wide by 0.7m tall and is 3.03m south of the deposit's north end. If indeed this is a fill retaining wall, then F.2 at least was created with some care. As with other instances of similar burials of buildings in the site core, it may be that F.1 and 2 were intended as fill for architectural elements that were never completed. On the other hand, they might have been viewed as ends in themselves, definitively terminating the use of edifices by covering their most salient physical features. What F.2 was intended to obscure is unclear, especially if Str. 1A-52-Sub2 was already resting beneath a mantle of soil (S.6). In either case, and for whatever reasons, once buildings were covered by cobbles and earth they would have appeared as relatively featureless hills that likely sprouted vegetation in this subtropical environment.

Time Span 7

After the entombment of Str. 1A-52-1st and its environs the area was gradually covered by the deposition of several soil levels. On the far south, S.5, a fine-textured, very hard-compacted, tan clay accumulated to a maximum depth of 0.32m against the south face of F.2

(S.5's base was not found). Overlying S.5 by 0.11-0.19m is a fine-textured, hard-compacted, dark gray clay that overlaps the lower southern slope of F.2 for 1.33m. Topping this layer by 0.12-0.21m is S.2, a moderately fine-textured, moderately hard-compacted, brown soil. Stratum 2 covers F.2 and is found at depths up to 0.77m to the north where it blankets the lower slopes of Str. 1A-52-1st. Stratum 1, a moderately fine-textured, hard-compacted, root-rich, dark brown soil covers S.2 by 0.08-0.14m. Stratum 1 not only covers F.2 but also caps F.1 both on Str. 1A-52-1st's summit and its sides. This widespread distribution of S.1 implies that it derives, in part, from earth originally introduced with F.1 and 2; possibly these stone deposits were covered with an earth cap. Such a veneer would have enhanced the impression of Str. 1A-52-1st as a rounded hill. Embedded in S.1 and 2 is a light concentration of stones that likely fell from final-phase architecture, probably from F.1 and 2. These are found off all sides of the platform and F.2, extending to the limits of excavation.

Feature 11

Feature 11 appeared on ground surface as a north-to-south low rise that ran roughly east-west ca. 12.5m south of Str. 1A-51. The construction juts north over its eastern-most 5m, coming to within 10m south of Str. 1A-50. Three discontinuous segments of F.11 were revealed in Subop. 30F, H, and I, located on the feature's approximate center, west, and east ends, respectively. A total of 20m² of prehistoric deposits was uncovered in the process of excavating these suboperations. Digging was pursued to a maximum depth of 1.23m below modern ground surface outside construction; F.11's fill was not investigated. The study of F.11 spanned three weeks in 1988 supervised by Patricia Reed and Patricia Whooley.

Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.3	-	LCL I/II?
2	F.11-1st	U.1-6	-	-	LCL II/III
3	-	-	S.1, 2	F.1	

Time Span 1

Stratum 3, a moderately coarse-textured, loosely compacted, light tan sand, was deposited during this interval. Sloping up 0.13m over 1.21m south-to-north away from TS.2 construction, S.3 is at least 0.24m thick (its base was not encountered in our excavations).

Time Span 2

Feature 11 was apparently built in at least two distinct segments. On the west, it consists of, minimally, three, low stone-faced terraces that ascend from north-to-south. The basal riser (U.1) is constructed of faced blocks, stands 0.1m high, and has a stone tread 0.27m wide. The

next ascending riser (U.2) is made using unmodified river cobbles as is the upper-most exposed terrace (U.3). Units 2 and 3 are 0.12-0.18m high and U.2 measures 0.5m across. Unit 6 is the north-south running wall with which U.1-3 corner on the west. This construction is made from a mix of cobbles (predominately) and cut blocks. All-in-all, therefore, the U.1-3 and 6 segments of F.11 rises ca. 0.4m in three stone-faced ascents to the south. This is quite distinct from F.11's northeast outset made up of U.4 and 5. The former, the basal riser, consists of carefully coursed river cobbles and stands 0.78m above the top of S.3 (U.4 is set 0.09m into S.3). Unit 5 is 0.27m south of U.4 and rises 0.22m above the latter. Based on the observed discrepancy in the depths of the U.4/5 and U.1/3, 6 portions of F.11 it appears that the ancient ground surface rose markedly (ca. 0.7m) over ca. 15m from east-to-west. There is no sign of such a slope evident in the modern terrain.

Feature 11 consists of two segments. The longer, western portion stands 0.4m high, measures an estimated 28m long, and is oriented approximately 81 degrees. This segment of the construction is faced on its north, alley-facing side by three low, stone-faced terraces; there is no evidence on ground surface to suggest that F.11 ever rose higher or has a back (south) wall. On the east, F.11 projects roughly 4.2m north towards Str. 1A-50-1st and runs east for at least 6.5m at an alignment of 79 degrees. Here, the basal riser towers 0.78m above an earthen surface and is succeeded on the south by a second, 0.22m-high terrace (1m tall overall). These differences in the heights of F.11's basal facings suggest that the ground above which they were built rose about 0.7m over 15m from east-to-west. The basal terrace riser in the western segment of F.11 is fashioned of cut blocks while all other constructions are fabricated employing river cobbles (U.6, the western basal facing is a mixture of cobbles and blocks with the former in the majority).

Time Span 3

After abandonment, U.4 on the east was nearly completely covered by the deposition of S.2, a coarse-textured, moderately hard-compacted, brown soil. Roughly 0.78m of S.2 was deposited now. Capping S.2 is S.1, a 0.21-0.39m thick moderately coarse-textured, moderately soft-compacted, root-rich, brown soil. Strata 1 and 2 together blanket all TS.2 architecture. Embedded in S.1 and 2 is a light concentration of stones fallen from final-phase construction (F.1). These rocks are densest where they overly architecture and drop in density north of F.11 beyond which they do not seem to extend more than 0.5m

Test Pits

Two test pits, Subop. 30D and E, were dug in the approximate center of the northern and southern ends of the playing alley, respectively. Suboperation 30D measures 1x1.2m while Subop. 30E covers 3m² (making for a grand total of 4.2m² revealed in these investigations). The probes, conducted over two weeks in 1988, were designed to test for the presence of a formal surface in the alley and any stone markers that might have graced that floor. Digging was pursued to a maximum depth of 1.01m below modern ground surface, all signs of a floor or stone markers successfully eluding our efforts to detect them.

Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.5, 6	-	
2	-	-	S.4	-	
3	-	-	S.3	-	LCL II
4	-	-	S.1, 2	-	

Time Span 1

The earliest activity attested to in our alley probes is the deposition of at least 0.15m of S.6, a very coarse-textured (pebbles as much as 1cm in diameter), very loosely consolidated, brown sand (the base of this layer was not encountered). Blanketing S.6 by 0.07-0.11m is a nearly identical sand (S.5) distinguished from the underlying layer by its somewhat smaller grain size and slightly harder packing.

Time Span 2

Stratum 4, a moderately coarse-textured, hard-compacted tan soil with many small (1cm or less in diameter) rock inclusions covers S.5 by 0.26-0.36m.

Time Span 3

Covering S.4 is 0.09-0.16m of S.3, a fine-textured, hard-compacted, tan soil. The level upper surface of S.3 likely served as the playing alley's floor. This is based primarily on the relationship of S.3 to Str. 1A-50-1st's west basal wall, U.1, which is set 0.08m into S.3 and rises 0.36m above it. No vestiges of a more formal surface were noted in either Subop. 30D or 30E.

Time Span 4

Following abandonment of the ballcourt, a fine-textured, hard-compacted, brown soil (S.2) accumulated up to 0.28m atop S.3. Stratum 2, in turn, was covered by 0.12-0.14m of S.1, a fine-textured, hard-compacted, gray-brown, root-rich soil. No stones associated with any constructions are recorded in these tests.

Structure 1A-58-Sub1 (Southern Terraces)

The 2.5m-high natural ascent that defines Op. 30's south side was faced with a series of stone-terraces that culminate in Str. 1A-58 on the terrace summit. These were investigated by Lisa Collins, in collaboration with Patricia Reed and Patricia Whooley, as part of Lisa Collins' test-excavation program (Op.27). Suboperation 27A cut across the approximate center of this construction reaching from its base to summit whereas Subop. 27H and I were designed to locate the terrace's northwest and northeast corners. Fully 32m² was cleared in the course of this

work, conducted during one month in 1988, digging being carried down to maximum depths of 0.82m and 0.58m below modern ground surface outside and within architecture, respectively.

Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.2	-	MPrecl, LCL I
2	Str. 1A-58-Sub1	U.1-14	-	F.1	LCL II/III
3	-	-	S.1	F.2	

Time Span 1

Deposition of at least 0.28m of a fine-textured, hard-compacted, brown clay (S.2) is the first activity attested to in this portion of Op.27 (the base of this soil layer was not encountered). Stratum 2 was only revealed at the base of the terrace system where it rose 0.22m over a revealed 1.65m north-to-south.

Time Span 2

A 0.06-0.1m level of small cobbles (F.1) was found in the axial trench (Subop. 27A) where it caps S.2 for the full north-south exposed extent of that layer. Though it is not clear, F.1 may be the remnants of a stone floor fronting at least the central portion of the terraces. Rising above F.1 are 10 reconstructed stone-faced terraces, the upper-most examples being found in a poor state of preservation (Str. 1A-58-Sub1). The lowest three risers (U.1-3) are 0.05-0.3m tall by 0.2-0.3m wide. Unit 1, the basal facing, is fashioned of cut stones while the next ascending terrace (U.2) consists of a course of masonry blocks overlying a cobble foundation. Unit 3 is fashioned exclusively using cobbles. The next terrace in the sequence, U.4, is the broadest, encompassing 1.55m north-south and rising 0.46m above the U.3 tread. Fully 1.01m of the U.4 tread consists of the wall itself, implying that this broad construction was the anchor against which U.1-3 were built. Though only partially preserved, it appears that U.4 was fabricated using a combination of cobbles and cut blocks. The subsequent four terraces (U.5-8) are 0.2-0.4m high by 0.36-0.8m across (all but U.5 are 0.36-0.55m wide) and made using cobbles. Unit 9, 0.55m south of U.8, was partially obscured by the erection of the latter terrace. Though 0.24m of U.9 still protrudes above U.8's tread, it appears to have preceded the latter. Unit 10 rises 0.2m above the U.9 terrace and is the step-up to the summit of Str. 1A-58-1st which overlooks the Op. 30 complex from the edge of the upper terrace.

The northern corners of the terrace system were not uncovered. On the east, U.3 seemingly runs for an estimated 13m from its exposure in the axial trench (Subop. 27A) before ending; it may turn a corner to the south at this point, though such a resolution was not clearly attested to in the excavations. A similar situation pertains on the west where U.3 ends roughly 12m west of Subop. 27A without turning an obvious corner (U.2 has, so far, only been observed in Subop. 27A and may be restricted to the central portion of the terrace system). Unit 1, the

basal riser, was traced, in three discontinuous segments, for 31m east-west without showing any signs of ending. On the west, U.1 seems to change direction slightly, stepping back 0.25m to the south before resuming its westward course for at least an additional 1m (now called U.12). Units 13 and 14, two ascending terraces that rise to the south above U.12, likely represent continuations of U.3 and 4. The full north-south extent of this western terrace system was not revealed.

The only place where construction fill was investigated lies immediately south of U.8. Here a densely packed deposit of small to medium-size cobbles set in brown soil (U.11) backs U.8 and covers the lower exposed 0.24m of U.9.

Structure 1A-58-Sub1 is a series of 10 stone-faced terraces that rises 2.48m from north-to-south and extends at least 32m at an orientation of roughly 103 degrees. The risers in this sequence tend to be low and narrow, ascending 0.05-0.46m and measuring 0.2-0.8m wide. The principal exception to this pattern is the fourth ascending terrace which is 1.55m across. The latter is faced by a very substantial wall that may have been the primary construction against which the lower three terraces were built. Cut blocks seem to have been the primary building stones used in the two lowest terraces while cobbles are used extensively throughout the surviving portions of the upper risers; the facing for the fourth terrace is made using a mix of both rock types. The eastern and western ends of Str. 1A-58-Sub1 were not found though on the west it appears that the terraces step back 0.25m to the south before continuing westward. The limited portion of fill revealed in Subop. 27A indicates that the terraces were underlain by densely packed stones set in a brown soil matrix.

Time Span 3

After abandonment, Str. 1A-58-Sub1 was largely covered by the natural deposition of S.1, a fine-textured, hard-compacted, dark brown, root-rich soil. Embedded in S.1 is a dense to moderately dense concentration of stones tumbled from final-phase architecture. These rocks are particularly common overlying construction but, though declining in density to the north, they were still found 1.68m north of U.1.

Chronological Summary

Scattered sherds diagnostic of the Middle Preclassic period were found mixed with later materials in excavations in the southern portion of the Ballcourt Zone (Strs. 1A-52 and 1A-58-Sub1). Comparably scant and stratigraphically compromised fragments of Late Preclassic vessels were uncovered in the environs of Str. 1A-24 and 1A-51 further to the north. These sparse indicators of Preclassic settlement indicate at least a light and dispersed occupation of the Ballcourt Zone during the early periods in question. Signs of Late Classic I settlement were recovered from the vicinity of Str. 1A-58-Sub1 while some indications of settlement dating towards the end of this span (Late Classic I/II and II/I) were noted at Str. 1A-52, 1A-24, and F.11. Structures 1A-52-Sub1, 1A-52-Sub2, and Str. 1A-24-Sub1, all modest constructions, seem to have been raised and in use near the end of Late Classic I and the beginning of Late Classic II.

All of the investigated edifices were likely erected during Late Classic II, continuing in use into the last years of that period (LCL II/III) and, possibly, into the very beginning of late Classic III. Most of these buildings underwent renovations either at the end of Late Classic II or very early in Late Classic III soon after which all but Strs. 1A-24, 1A-58-Sub1, and F.11 were at

least partially buried by sizable quantities of rocks set in a brown earth matrix. That earth helped keep the stones in place, as relatively few were found having slid from further upslope, and thus effectively hid from view most of the construction units that defined these platforms as cultural creations. After several years what had been three monumental platforms would have appeared as small hills on which vegetation likely grew and further distracted attention from the cultural origins of these mounds.

Evidence of subsequent occupation is limited to a few, scattered sherds diagnostic of the Early Postclassic found principally on Str. 1A-52. There is no construction assigned to this span and the paucity of Early Postclassic debris probably hints at a small, dispersed population living among the ruins and “hills” of the Ballcourt Zone.

References

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