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## PVN OP 169 Excavation Report

Edward M. Schortman  
*Kenyon College*

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## Site 169

Site 169 consists of 19 surface-visible platforms, 14 of which define three plazas set in a rough north-south line. Two circular to oblong-shaped depressions are located along the eastern edge of two of these plazas while a third, shallower declivity lies just off the western edge of the central plaza. Altogether, Site 169 covers approximately 28,900m<sup>2</sup> and is located c. 600m southwest of Site 187 and 2.3km in the same direction from Site 168. The settlement occupies relatively flat terrain atop a high terrace above the Rio Chamelecon. The latter watercourse is roughly 900m to the north while a season stream course is 200m to the east. Excavations conducted here in 1988 uncovered 54.5m<sup>2</sup> in the course of investigating five buildings (Strs. 169-2, 3, 4, 8, and 12) and the southeastern-most depression. This research was overseen by T. Neff from April 26-May 9.

## Structure 169-2

Structure 169-2 is situated near the site's center ca. 3m north of the shallow, western depression and 9m east of Str. 169-1. Together with Str. 169-1, Str. 169-2 defines the south edge of the northernmost plaza at the settlement; Strs. 169-12 and 13 delimit the patio's west side, Str. 169-14 its north margin, and a sizable depression lies along the east flank. Approximately 30m<sup>2</sup> were excavated within Subop. 169 E, F, G, H, J, K, L, and M, exposing portions of all of the platform's basal walls as well as segments of the summit. Digging was pursued to maximum depths of 0.9m and 0.7m below modern ground surface within and outside architecture, respectively. One major construction phase was revealed in the course of this work which was directed by T. Neff.

## Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.1-3	-	LCL III?
2	Str. 169-2-1st	U.1-10	-	-	LCLIII, EPC
3	-	-	S.1	F.1	

## Time Span 1

The earliest activity identified in the environs of Str. 169-2-1st was the seemingly natural deposition of S. 2 and 3. The lowest of these soil levels, S.3, is a fine-textured, hard-compacted, gray clay that contains a few small pebbles. Stratum 3 was revealed to a maximum thickness of 0.22m (its base lies beyond excavation limits) and it maintains a fairly flat upper surface over the 12.7m it was exposed running north-south beneath and beyond TS 2 architecture. Stratum 2, a coarse-textured, hard-compacted, reddish-brown soil in which many small pebbles are embedded, covers S. 3 by 0.16-0.28m. As with its predecessor, S.2 is more-or-less flat across

its revealed 12.7m, rising 0.11m over this distance from south-to-north. As much as 0.16m of S.1, a dark brown-to-black, fine-textured, hard-compacted soil, overlies S.2 but runs beneath TS.2 architecture. It appears that the raising of Str. 169-2-1st interrupted this soil's deposition, most of S.1 being laid down after the platform's abandonment. The recovery of a few artifacts from at least S.2 and lower S.1 implies a human presence in the area prior to TS.2.

## Time Span 2

Structure 169-2-1st is a stone-faced platform defined by substantial basal facings on all sides (U.1-4). Units 1-4 stand a preserved 0.2-0.3m high and measure 0.63-0.83m wide. In each case the basal riser is succeeded by an earthen-floored terrace that runs 0.88-2m back to the stone-faced step-ups to the summit (U.5-8); the widest of these terraces is on the north. Units 5-8 are 0.12-0.32m high and are 1-1.3m across. The significant width of these units, broader than it would seem necessary to sustain perishable upper walls, hints at their use as both superstructure foundations and benches. In all cases save one, the walls defining the summit were built on fill (U.9, see below) that is retained by the basal risers (U.1-4). The exception is U.5, the southern summit wall. This construction's base is equal to that of U.3, the southern platform facing. It may be that U.5 originally bounded Str. 169-2-1st's southern side and was later replaced by U.3. If this was the case, the addition of U.3 would have expanded the building's north-south dimension by 1.73m.

The room contained by U.5-8 covers 4.5x10.4m. There is no evidence that this space was subdivided, though our excavations were concentrated on the enclosure's eastern and western flanks and did not expose much of the center. A 1x2m pit sunk into the approximate middle of the space, however, did not reveal additional foundations. It may well be, therefore, that Str.169-2-1st's superstructure consisted of one room measuring 46.8m<sup>2</sup>. A white plaster floor (U.10), 0.04-0.06m thick, was exposed in a deep probe dug in the superstructure's northwest corner. Units 7 and 8, the northern and eastern summit walls, rest on U.10 which, in turn, covers U.9. The latter is a very fine-textured, moderately soft-compacted, dark brown soil that was used as construction fill in both the platform's central core and terraces. Though the stratigraphic relations are unclear, U.10 may represent an earlier version of Str. 169-2-1st's superstructure set atop a platform that may have been no more than 0.2m high. Subsequently, the summit room was filled with earth (possibly a continuation of U.9) up to the tops of U.5-8, thus covering the U.10 floor by ca. 0.5m. If this reconstruction is correct, what we currently gloss as TS.2 may have been subdivided into two construction phases.

Overall, Str. 169-2-1st is a stone-faced, earth-filled platform that rises 0.7m high, covers 10.25x16.3m, and is oriented approximately 81 degrees. A single earthen-floored terrace 1.8-1.9m wide bounds the platform on all sides and gives way to low (0.12-0.32m high) but broad (1-1.3m across) step-ups to the summit. These risers may have doubled as foundations for perishable upper walls and benches. The room they contain encompasses 46.8m<sup>2</sup> and seems to have been surfaced with earth during its final period of use. An earlier version of this space was apparently paved with white plaster. This plaster sat at the base of the surrounding summit walls. It may have been at this time that U.5, the southern summit wall, also served as the basal facing on this side.

Though we remain uncertain on several points regarding the above sequence, Str. 169-2-1st possibly began as a 0.2m-high platform that covered 8.52m north-south and was surmounted by a room with a white plaster floor. The putative earlier building's orientation was the same as

that of the later version. All stone construction consists of unmodified river cobbles set in an earth mortar.

Time Span 3

After Str. 169-2-1st was abandoned the edifice was blanketed by the deposition of S.1, characterized in its upper reaches by numerous roots and included pebbles. Stratum 1 reached thicknesses of 0.24-0.4m off the building’s flanks, pinching out atop the platform. Embedded in this soil layer is a light scattering of stones fallen from final-phase architecture (F.1). Feature 1 was found extending for 1-1.2m from the platform’s north and south sides. The paucity of rocks making up F.1 suggests that Str.169-2-1st’s superstructure did not incorporate many stones; it could have been left open or its walls were fashioned using primarily perishable materials.

Structure 169-3

Structure 169-3 is about 13m south of Str. 169-2 on the west side of the southernmost plaza at the site. Structure 169-7 is ca. 33m across the plaza to the east while Str. 169-4 lies roughly 13m to the south. Excavations at Str. 169-3 within Subop. 169D uncovered 5.5m<sup>2</sup> off the platform’s south side, reaching a maximum depth of 0.7m beyond (south of) construction. Str. 169-3’s fill was not investigated. All digging on and around Str. 169-3 was directed by T. Neff.

Time Span

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.1-3	-	
2	Str. 169-3-1st	U.1	-	-	LCL III?, EPC
3	-	-	S.1	F.1	

Time Span 1

The earliest activity attested to in the environs of Str. 169-3-1st is the natural deposition of S.3, a very fine-textured, gray clay. This soil was only revealed in the base of excavation where it was exposed to a maximum thickness of 0.1m, its base lying beyond these limits. Stratum 3 rises 0.12m over 2.7m from north-to-south; the layer dips down and below TS.2 architecture.

Stratum 2, a moderately coarse-textured, mottled brown layer, covers S.3 by 0.22-0.27m. Like its antecedent, S.2 rises gradually from north-to-south, ascending 0.09m over 3.56m in that direction. Approximately 0.12m of a loosely compacted, moderately fine-textured, dark brown soil (S.1) covers S.2 and underlies TS.2 construction. Though deposition of this layer resumed after Str. 169-3-1st’s abandonment, it appears that S.1 was first introduced bear the end of TS.1.

The recovery of a few artifacts from S.2 and lower S.1 indicates a human presence in the

area prior to TS.2.

### Time Span 2

The only segment of construction uncovered in Subop. 169D is Str. 169-3-1<sup>st</sup>'s southern basal wall (U.1). Unit 1 stands a preserved 0.48m high and is built of unmodified river cobbles set in an earth mortar. The southern basal facing is aligned roughly east-west.

### Time Span 3

Following abandonment, Str. 169-3-1<sup>st</sup> was covered by the continued deposition of S.1. This layer, which contains numerous roots in its upper portions, reaches a maximum thickness of 0.47m where it blankets U.1, but pinches out towards the platform's summit. Embedded in S.1 is a moderately dense concentration of stones fallen from TS.2 architecture (F.1). Feature 1 extends for 1.95m south of Str. 169-3-1<sup>st</sup>; a more dispersed distribution of smaller stones covers the exposed portion of the summit.

### Structure 169-4

Structure 169-4 defines, along with Str. 169-3 lying 13m to the north, the west side of the large southern plaza. Structure 169-6 is ca. 49m to the east across that patio. Excavations here were limited to 6.5m<sup>2</sup> cleared along the platform's northeast corner (Subop. 169C). Digging was pursued to maximum depths of 0.65m and 0.62m below modern ground surface within and outside construction, respectively. This work, directed by T. Neff, revealed evidence of two different periods of renovation.

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.3	-	
2	Str. 169-4-1 <sup>st</sup>	U.1, 3	-	-	LCL III
3	Str. 169-4-1 <sup>st</sup>	U.2, 3	-	-	LCL III
4	-	-	S.1, 2	F.1	

### Time Span 1

The first period of activity identified in the environs of Str. 169-4 is the apparently natural deposition of a moderately fine-textured soil mottled gray and brown in color (S.3). Stratum 3 was revealed at the base of excavation east of TS.2 and 3 architecture, reaching a maximum exposed thickness of 0.2m (the base was not revealed). Over the 2.64m that S.3 was exposed it rose 0.2m from east-to-west before disappearing under construction (U.2). No artifacts were clearly associated with this soil level, tentatively implying that human settlement in the immediate area was sparse at best during TS.1.

## Time Span 2

The earliest construction relating to Str. 169-4-1st that was uncovered in Subop. 169C is a 0.37m-high by 0.68m-wide wall made of unmodified river cobbles (U.1). Unit 1 was likely the platform's penultimate eastern basal facing, later replaced by U.2, 1.45m to the east. The wall runs roughly north-south and retains a fill (U.3) composed of moderately fine-textured, moderately hard-compacted, dark brown soil.

## Time Span 3

An eastward continuation of U.3 blankets U.1 and is retained on the east by U.2, a 0.39m-high by 0.77-wide wall fashioned from unmodified river cobbles and aligned roughly north-south. Unit 2 was likely the final eastern basal facing of Str. 169-4-1st, fronting an earthen-floored terrace that was at least 2.42m wide (the next ascending riser was not encountered).

It may be that U.1 and 2 are parts of two distinct, sequent construction phases worthy of separate designations (e.g., Strs. 169-4-1st and 169-4-2nd). Given the limited extent of our exposure, however, we felt more confident treating them as stages in the ongoing renovation of one edifice rather than the remnants of two major construction episodes.

## Time Span 4

Following Str. 169-4-1st's abandonment, the lower 0.25m of U.2 was covered by S.2, a moderately soft-compacted, moderately fine-textured, pebble-rich, dark brown soil virtually identical with U.3. This layer varies in thickness from 0.14-0.25m and is blanketed by S.1, a very similar soil distinguished from S.2 by the concentration of roots found within it and its loose compaction. Stratum 1 is 0.11-0.24m thick and covers all exposed TS.2 architecture. Embedded in S.1 and 2 are a few dispersed rocks that had fallen from final-phase architecture (F.1). As would be expected, the F.1 stones are densest in areas close to U.2 but are still found for up to 2.53m east of that wall.

## Structure 169-8

Structure 169-8 defines the east flank of the central plaza. The building is approximately 9m southeast of Str. 169-10 and 42m east and across the patio from Str. 169-9. Excavations here were conducted within Subop. 169B, clearing 5.5m<sup>2</sup> near the building's southeast corner. Digging was carried down to a maximum depth of 0.64m below modern ground surface outside of construction and 0.53m into architecture. These investigations, supervised by T. Neff, revealed signs of one construction phase.

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.1, 2	-	LCL III?

2	Str. 169-8-1st	U.1, 2	-	-	LCL III
3	-	-	S.1	F.1	

Time Span 1

Natural deposition of S.3, a fine-textured gray clay, initiates the known sequence of activities in and around Str. 169-8. Only a very limited portion of this soil level was uncovered in Subop. 169B; it projects only 1.8m westward from the trench’s west margin and was exposed to a maximum thickness of 0.07m before disappearing beyond excavation limits. Stratum 2, a moderately coarse-textured mottled brown soil, covers S.3 by 0.42m. This layer rises gradually from east to west, ascending 0.29m over 3.21m in that direction. The retrieval of a few artifacts from S.2 implies a human presence in the area prior to the erection of Str. 169-8-1st.

Time Span 2

Only a very limited section of Str. 169-8-1st’s eastern basal wall (U.1) was uncovered in excavations. This north-south running construction is fashioned of unmodified river cobbles and rises 0.42m, measuring 1.1m across. Unit 1 retains a fill composed of fine-textured, gray clay indistinguishable from S.3. Most likely U.1 fronted an earthen-floored terrace that extended at least 2.66m westward; the next ascending riser to the summit was not revealed.

Time Span 3

Following the platform’s abandonment, 0.16-0.21m of S.1, a loosely compacted, dark brown, root-rich humus, accumulated over S.2 and TS.2 architecture. Embedded in S.1 is a light concentration of stones tumbled from final phase architecture (F.1). Feature 1 was recorded extending for 1.3m east of U.1 and overlying construction leading up towards the summit.

Structure 169-12

Structure 169-12 bounds the west side of the northernmost plaza. The building lies ca. 32m north of Str. 169-1 and a scant 4m south of Str. 169-13; the northernmost depression is roughly 34m to the east across the plaza. Fully 5m<sup>2</sup> was cleared on Str. 169-12’s east side, near the platform’s northeast corner, within Subop. 169I, digging being carried down to maximum depths of 0.94m and 0.8m below modern ground surface outside and within architecture, respectively. These investigations, directed by T. Neff, revealed evidence for one construction phase.

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.2, 3	-	LCL III?



2	Str. 169-12-1st	U.1, 2	-	-	LCL III
3	-	-	-	F.1	LCL III
4	-	-	S.1, 2	F.2	

### Time Span 1

Natural deposition of S.3, a fine-textured gray clay with a few included pebbles, was the first activity attested to in Str. 169-12's environs. Extending 1.3m into Subop. 169I from the western trench margin, this layer was exposed to a maximum thickness of 0.09m before it disappeared beyond excavation limits. Stratum 3 rises 0.07m from west to east over its revealed extent of 1.3m.

Covering S.3 by roughly 0.3m is a moderately fine-textured, moderately hard-compacted, pebble-rich brown soil (S.2). It appears that S.2 continued to accumulate in TS. 3 after Str. 169-12-1st was abandoned. Nevertheless, at least 0.3m of this soil intervenes between S.3 and the base of TS. 2 architecture, suggesting that erection of Str.169-12-1st interrupted the natural deposition of S.2.

Recovery of artifacts from throughout S.2 points to a human presence in the vicinity while the lower 0.3m of this soil was being laid down.

### Time Span 2

Structure 169-12-1st's eastern basal wall (U.1) is fashioned of unmodified river cobbles, stands 0.64m high, measures 0.85m across, and is oriented roughly north-south. Unit 1 retains a fill (U.2) composed of fine-textured gray clay with a moderate amount of small pebbles mixed in with the earth. It is the increased frequency of these small stones that distinguishes U.2 from S.4. Unit 1 probably fronted an earthen-floored terrace that extended at least 2.1m to the west; the putative next ascending riser was not revealed.

### Time Span 3

Following abandonment, a lens of fine-textured gray clay (F.1) was laid down against U.1's east (outward looking) face. Feature 1 completely covers U.1 from its exposed base to top and pinches out 2.03m east of the basal facing. The same soil level continues upslope heading towards the summit where it blankets the U.2 fill by as much as 0.37m. Feature 1's behavioral significance is uncertain. It is distinct from the soils which bracket it above and below (S.1 and 3, respectively) suggesting that its introduction signifies a break in the local depositional regime. The feature does resemble S.3 deposited in TS.1 and so could represent a brief return to the conditions that favored the creation of that soil. Still, no comparable fluctuations in soil formation processes were noted elsewhere at the settlement and F.1 is closely associated with Str. 169-12-1st. The latter relationship implies that its appearance has something to do with activities on that building. Given the similarity between F.1 and U.2 it could be that the former represents fill washing out from within the platform after U.1 was no longer being maintained. This would not explain F.1's position atop U.2, however. Alternatively, therefore, it is possible

that F.1 was introduced to bury U.1 and 2, perhaps in preparation for extending the building further to the east and raising its height. There is no sign that the stone facings that would have presumably been raised to retain this fill were ever built. It may also have been the case that at least parts of Str. 169-12-1st's eastern flank were intentionally buried to terminate formally the platform's use-life.

Time Span 4

The last period of activity on and around Str. 169-12-1st began with the continued accumulation of S.2 (see above). This soil covers the eastern 0.39m of F.1 and is succeeded by S.1, a loosely compacted, root-rich dark brown soil (S.1). Stratum 1 collected to depths of 0.14-0.28m above F.1 and S.2. Incorporated in S.1, and extending down as much as 0.14m into F.1, is a moderately dense concentration of stones displaced from TS.2 architecture (F.2). Feature 2 is densest within 1.39m east of U.1 though a few of its component rocks are found above that wall and further upslope towards the summit.

Test Pits in the Southeast Depression

Two test excavations, each measuring 1m on a side, were dug into the north (Subop. 169N) and west sides (Subop 169O) of the oblong-shaped depression lying on Site 169's southeast margin. Work here was designed to determine when the depression was dug and why it might have been excavated. The declivity is approximately 15m deep, measures roughly 42m northeast-southwest by 27m northwest-southeast, and is ca.21m east of Str.169-6. Digging in Subop. 169N and 169O was carried to maximum depths of 1m and 1.2m below modern ground surface, respectively. No architecture was recorded in either case though a very few artifacts were scattered throughout the upper exposed levels.

Time Spans

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

Time Span 1

The natural deposition of S.4, a fine-textured, hard-compacted, gray clay exposed to a maximum thickness of 0.26m, marks the first activity attested to within the depression (its base lies beyond excavation limits). No artifacts are clearly associated with this level, implying that there was no human presence in the immediate area when S.4 was laid down. A comparable gray clay is noted beneath architecture throughout Site 169, suggesting that the entire settlement was originally underlain by this soil. The frequency with which earth of this sort was used in

architectural fill at Site 169 suggests that it was intentionally sought for this purpose; the southeastern depression may, therefore, be a borrow pit dug to extract this gray clay for construction purposes.

### Time Span 2

As in several other instances at Site 169, the underlying gray clay is blanketed here by a moderately fine-textured, mottled gray-and-brown colored soil (S.3). Stratum 3 is 0.32-0.45m thick and contains at least one sizable rock (exposed within 0.03m of the top of S.3 in Subop. 169N; F.1). This stone, measuring 0.11m thick by 0.34m long, was found lying flat. As no rocks of comparable size were recorded in either probe, it seems likely that the F.1 stone was introduced into the depression by cultural forces. Most likely it represents debris derived from one of Str. 169's buildings.

Soil resembling S.3 was laid down prior to construction at Strs. 169- 3-1st, 169-4-1st, and 169-8-1st. This tentatively suggests that S.3 accumulated during the interval immediately preceding the initiation of most known building at the site. Feature 1, on the other hand, may pertain to the period of abandonment and platform deterioration, its single rock having washed into the depression and slowly sunk into the upper part of S.3.

### Time Span 3

Stratum 3 is covered by 0.1-0.24m of moderately fine-textured, moderately hard-compacted, dark brown soil (S.2). Stratum 2, in turn, is blanketed by 0.2-0.3m of a nearly identical soil distinguished by its looser compaction and greater prevalence of roots (S.1). Most likely S.1 and 2 are parts of the same soil level differentially affected by their proximity to modern ground surface. Like comparable strata uncovered in other parts of the site, they probably accumulated well after the nearby buildings had been abandoned.

### Chronological Summary

The paucity of artifacts of all sorts, let alone those which are temporally diagnostic, recovered from Site 169 makes estimation of its age(s) difficult. Pottery sherds, the most temporally sensitive and common cultural materials found at the settlement, were relatively infrequent and only 228 of them from four structures and one test pit were analyzed. Consequently, the following chronological reconstruction must be treated with caution.

The earliest period of occupation identified at Site 169 dates to Late Classic III. All investigated constructions, save Str. 169-3-1st, were apparently raised during this interval. The declivity tested by Subop. 169N and O was also seemingly excavated at about this time, a correlation that makes sense if this pit was the source of earth used as fill for Site 169's platforms. There are slight indications that use of the site pre-dating the erection of Strs. 169-2, 3, 4, 8, and 12 may date to Late Classic III as well. Site 169 apparently continued to be occupied into the Early Postclassic. It is possible that Str. 169-3-1st was raised now. Just as likely, however, this building was erected during the preceding Late Classic III, its use continuing into the Early Postclassic. Similarly, given the difficulty of distinguishing Late Classic III and Early Postclassic deposits with small artifact samples, it is quite plausible that even those buildings that did not yield material diagnostic of the latter period were occupied during the latter span. In

general, therefore, we tentatively hypothesize that Site 169 was built and used for a relatively short interval beginning in Late Classic III and ending during the Early Postclassic.