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PVN OP 017 Excavation Report

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Operation 17

Operation 17 is composed of an irregular arrangement of five small constructions (Strs. 103-107) that covers about 900m². They are located on relatively level terrain at the base of the high terrace that supports the remainder of La Sierra's North Cluster. Operation 18 overlooks Op. 17 from the crest of that ascent, lying 20m to the west. Operation 15 is the same distance to the southwest. Structure 107 was the lone edifice within this aggregate that was excavated. A total of 25m² was cleared in the course of this work which was overseen by C. Eaton and T. Neff during the 1988 field season.

Structure 107

Structure 107 is on Op. 17's southeast edge lying equidistant between (5m from) Strs. 106 on the northeast and Str. 103 on the southwest. Investigations here focused on digging a trench that ran north-south across Str. 107's approximate center, limited excavations being pursued off that initial cut to expose the building's southwest and northeast corners. Approximately 25m² was cleared in the course of this work within Subop. 17A, digging being pursued to maximum depths of 2.1m and 1.3m below modern ground surface beyond and within architecture, respectively. Remnants of three construction episodes and two buildings that were not seen on ground surface (Strs. 107-Sub1, 107-Sub2) were identified in the course of this work which was directed by T. Neff and C. Eaton during the 1988 field season.

Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date(s)</u>
1	Str. 107-3rd	U.23	-	-	
2	Str. 107-2nd	U.1, 18, 21, 22	-	-	
3	Str. 107-1 st	U. 2-13, 20, 27	-	-	
	Str. 107-Sub1	U.16, 17, 19, 26			
4	Str. 107-1 st	U.25	-	-	
	Str. 107-Sub2	U.14, 15, 24, 28, 29			
5	-	-	S.6	F.1	
6	-	-	S.1-5, 7	F.2	

Time Span 1

The earliest activity identified in Str. 107's environs was the laying down of a floor composed of river-rounded stones (U.23). This surface is 0.56-0.67m below TS.3 architecture and was traced for 0.94m north-south between Str. 107-1st and 107-Sub1; its full limits were not revealed. Unit 23's architectural significance is unclear; it may be the remains of a formally prepared extra-mural surface or a floor laid down within a room.

Time Span 2

Unit 23 was blanketed by two successive fill units (U.21 and 22). Unit 22, a dense concentration of small to medium-size cobbles, blankets U.23 by 0.25m and is, in turn, covered by 0.47m of somewhat larger but more widely spaced river-worn rocks (U.21). The stones comprising U.21 and 22 were generally flat-laid and embedded within a fine-textured, hard-compacted, brown soil.

Units 21 and 22 were seemingly capped by a stone floor (U.18). Unit 18 was only identified where it fronted and underlay by 0.04m Str. 107-Sub1's east face (U.19) south of Str. 107-1st. This floor was exposed for 0.54m east-west but appears to have rested atop the U.21 fill. On the north U.1 is a stone construction, possibly a floor, that projected 0.8m north from under Str. 107-1st's north basal wall (U.3). Unit 1 was traced for 3.55m east-west over which distance it was oriented approximately 279 degrees. Though U.1's east end was identified excavations ceased before we found its western terminus or could determine much about the construction's architectural significance.

In general, by the time TS.2 came to a close what would become Str. 107-1st's south flank had been elevated 0.72m through the introduction of a stone-and-earth fill. At least part of this newly raised area was surfaced with stones. We do not know the sequence of events on the north that led up to the laying down of U.1. Given that this construction rests on the same level as U.18 and precedes TS.3 architecture, we tentatively infer that U.1 and 18 are roughly contemporary and pertain to two distinct, constructions of unknown dimensions and form. Both of these units were made with river cobbles set in a mud mortar.

Time Span 3

During this interval both Str. 107-1st and 107-Sub1 were erected. The former was ascended on the north by three risers (U.3, 5, 6). The basal facing, U.3, stands 1m tall though its lowest 0.2m was seemingly not visible above ancient ground surface (based on the positioning of U.2). Unit 3 was fronted by a 0.1m-tall outset (U.2) that rests 0.2m above the base of U.3 and projects 0.42m north of Str. 107-1st's north basal facing. Unit 2 intersects U.3 1.9m west of the platform's northeast corner and was traced for 2m to the west before excavation ceased. Overall, U.3 was uncovered for a total of 4m to the east where it intersected U.4, the building's eastern basal facing, to form Str. 107-1st's northeast corner. Unit 4 was followed for 0.55m to the south when excavations ceased. Unit 3 runs back (south) for 0.6m where it is succeeded by U.5. The latter rises 0.13m above U.3's stone tread and, in turn, gives way to a stone-surfaced surface that extends 0.88m south to U.6. Unit 6 ascends 0.29m above U.5 and gives way to the summit. This construction's relatively great width (measuring 1.4m

across north-south) may point to its use as both a support for a perishable upper wall and a bench or shelf incorporated within the superstructure.

Structure 107-1st was ascended on the south by five risers (U. 8, 10-13). Unit 8, the basal facing, rises 0.49m above the top of the U.21 fill and has a stone-surfaced tread that is 0.67m wide north-south. Unit 8 was followed for 3.3m to the west where it intersected U.9 (the platform's western basal facing) to form the building's southwest corner. Unit 9 was followed for 0.85m north of that corner. Unit 8 is succeeded on the north by U.10, a 0.34m-high facing the earthen tread of which is 0.6m wide. Unit 11 stands 0.13m above U.10's tread and is 0.72m wide. As with U.10, U.11's surface was apparently surfaced with earth. Unit 11 is succeeded on the north by U.12, a 0.12m-tall by 0.6m-wide facing that is topped by a stone surface. Unit 13, in turn, succeeds U.12 on the north, stands 0.16m high, and provides access to the summit.

Only a 1m-wide swath of the platform's superstructure was uncovered, revealing a stone-floored (U.27) room measuring 2.37m north-south. As noted above, the compartment's north wall (U.6) may have served in part as a bench. We cannot rule out the possibility that other superstructure rooms may lie outside the investigated portions of the summit.

Only limited portions of Str. 107-1st's fill were revealed in Subop. 17A. On the north, U.3, 5, and 6 retain and are underlain by a hearting composed of a very dense packing of small to large rocks set in a fine-textured, hard-compacted, brown soil (U.7). Units 10 and 11 on the south, in turn, are supported by a very similar earth but without the included rocks (U.20).

Lying 1.4m south of Str. 107-1st is a diminutive platform (Str. 107-Sub1) that is delimited on its north, west, and east sides by stone facings (U.16, 17, and 19) that are 0.6-0.7m high by 0.3-1.1m wide. The unusual girths of U.16 and 19 (1-1.1m across) may imply that they served to both support perishable upper walls and as shelves. The summit bordered by U.16, 17, and 19 measures 1.75m east-west by at least 0.9m north-south (Str. 107-Sub1's south margin was not revealed). The fill retained by U.16, 17, and 19 is a brown, fine-textured, hard-compacted soil (U.26).

By the time TS.3 came to an end, Str. 107-1st was a stone-faced, earth-and-stone-filled platform that measured 8.28m north-south by 5.15m east-west, stood 1.08-1.11m tall, and was aligned roughly 7 degrees. The building was ascended on the north by three risers standing 0.8m, 0.13m, and 0.29m tall and measuring 0.6m and 0.88m across. The final step up to the summit is 1.4m wide north-south and may well have functioned as the superstructure room's north foundation and a bench. A 0.1m-tall stone outset projects 0.42m north of the northern basal riser. This construction intersects the platform 1.9m west of its northeast corner and was followed for 2m to the west before investigations ceased. Five risers ascend to the summit on the south, these facings standing 0.49m, 0.34m, 0.13m, 0.12m, and 0.16m tall and measuring 0.67m, 0.6m, 0.72m, and 0.6m across. The step-up to the summit is 0.4m wide and probably served as the southern foundation for at least one summit room. The latter's stone-paved interior measures 2.37m north-south and, as noted, its wide north wall may have served in part as a bench.

Structure 107-Sub1 was, by this period, a stone-faced, earth-filled platform located 1.4m south of Str. 107-1st. The former measures 3.15m east-west by at least 1.9m north-south (its

south face was not identified), stands 0.6-0.7m high, and is oriented ca. 2 degrees. The building's seemingly featureless summit covers 1.75m east-west by minimally 0.9m north south and is bordered on the east and north by unusually wide (1-1.1m across) basal walls. The latter may have served in part as shelves.

Most architecture pertaining to TS.3 consists of river cobbles set in a brown earth matrix. Unit 2, the northern outset, was fashioned, however, almost exclusively of faced blocks. In general, no matter what stones were used, their flatter aspects were usually directed outwards. This was not seemingly the case for U.17 where such care was not much in evidence.

Time Span 4

By-and-large, Str. 107-1st's basic dimensions, orientation, and form were not much changed during this interval. The primary modification took the form of expanding the platform 1.2m to the east through the erection of U.25. The latter apparently replaced U.4 as Str. 107-1st's eastern basal wall.

In addition, a small platform was erected off Str. 107-1st's north flank (Str. 107-Sub2). The most prominent of the units related to this construction is a 0.59m-high by 0.77m-wide wall (U.14) that was raised 0.48m north of U.3, Str. 107-1st's north basal facing. Unit 14's east end was uncovered, the wall then being traced for 1.6m to the west before excavations here drew to a close. Unit 14 may have been built in two stages: the first is 0.54m across while the second consists of a 0.23m-wide addition made to U.14's north face. The above interpretation is suggested by a change in construction noted at this point in the wall and the fact that, whereas U.14's south face is 0.59m tall its north flank has a depth of only 0.18m. This pattern suggests that U.14 was the south facing for a platform the hearting of which was composed of a fine-textured, hard-compacted, light brown soil (U.28). At some point in the building's history this southern facing (U.14) was expanded slightly to the north, being built on and over the U.28 fill. The east side of the putative platform was apparently faced by U.15. This 0.4m-wide wall was traced for 0.7m north from its junction with U.14's northeast corner; U.15's northern end was not revealed in our excavations. The 0.48m separating U.3 and 14 was filled with a 0.54m-deep fill deposit composed of densely packed medium to small cobbles set in a fine-textured, hard-compacted, light brown soil (U.24). The introduction of U.24 linked Strs. 107-1st and Str. 107-Sub2.

It may be at this time that Strs. 107-1st and 107-Sub1 off the former's south flank were also linked by the introduction of U.29. The latter is a fill composed of small to large cobbles set in a fine-grained, hard-compacted, brown soil. Unit 29 fills the 1.4m intervening between Strs. 107-1st and 107-Sub1, completely burying U.8 (the former's southern basal riser) while 0.28m of U.16 (the latter's northern facing) likely still projected above the top of U.29. It is unclear how far U.29 extended west of Str. 107-Sub1's west face. Most likely, as was the case with Str. 107-Sub2 on the north, Str. 107-1st's south basal ascent continued to be exposed away from where it was masked by construction linking the main platform to its smaller southern neighbor.

As TS.4 came to an end, Str. 107-1st remained largely unchanged in form and orientation from how it looked at TS.3's conclusion. The only significant modification made to

the platform involved its expansion 1.2m to the east. As a result of this addition, Str. 107-1st now measured 8.28m by 6.35m.

A 0.59m-high, earth-filled platform (Str. 107-Sub2) oriented ca. 1 degree was erected 0.48m north of Str. 107-1st during this interval. This construction slightly overlapped and buried U.2, the outset fronting Str. 107-1st's north side. Structure 107-Sub2 measures, minimally, 1.6x0.7m and has an earthen-floored summit. No free-standing furniture was identified in the small portion of the building revealed in our excavations. At some point late in TS.4 the 0.48m separating Strs. 107-1st and 107-Sub2 was filled with a dense packing of stones set in a light brown soil matrix. This linkage would have facilitated passage between the two edifices though about 3.4m of Str. 107-1st's northern basal facing (U.3) east of Str. 107-Sub2 would still have been exposed. A similar situation seemingly pertained south of Str. 107-1st. Here the 1.4m separating that platform from Str. 107-Sub1 was filled with a mix of earth and stones. There seems, therefore, to have been a general effort to merge three separate buildings into one long (covering at least 13.82m north-south) construction as TS.4 neared its conclusion.

All constructions raised at this time were fashioned primarily of river cobbles set in a brown mud mortar. At least one cut block was incorporated into the U.25 addition to Str. 107-1st's east side while the north, shallow flank of U.24 is composed largely of faced masonry over its exposed 1.6m.

Time Span 5

During this interval as much as 0.89m of a soft-compacted, light brown clay (S.6) was deposited along Str. 107-1st's south flank covering Str. 107-Sub1. Resting on S.6 and located 0.3m west of Str. 107-Sub1 is a line of stones (F.1) measuring 0.65m long and oriented ca. 8 degrees. Feature 1 is one rock (0.17m) thick, sits at a level equivalent to Str. 107-Sub1's summit, and is composed of two rocks the flatter aspects of which are directed eastward. It may well be that F.1 consists of some rocks that fell from nearby architecture. The fact that these stones were mutually aligned, found lying flat and not tilting down from extant construction, tentatively implies that they may be the remnants of a foundation that was originally part of a surface-level building raised after architecture dating to TS.3 and 4 had been abandoned.

Time Span 6

Stratum 6 was covered by as much as 0.27m of a brown, hard-compacted, coarse-textured earth (S.4) that contains numerous small pebbles measuring 0.01m or less in diameter. Stratum 4 was cut through near the center of Str. 107-Sub1 and replaced in an area measuring 2.25m across by a hard compacted, crumbly, gray soil (S.7) that also contains many pebbles. The cut in which S.7 was deposited narrows as it moves upward, covering 1.1m across east-west at its top. A lens of soil which closely resembles S.7 (S.5) was noted resting atop S.6, buried by S.4, and lying 0.14m east of S.7. Stratum 4 measures 0.8m east-west and is maximally 0.12m thick.

On the north, Strs. 107-1st and 107-Sub2 are blanketed by 0.04-0.2m of a hard-compacted, fine-textured, brown soil (S.3). Stratum 3 slopes up to and over Str. 107-1st's two northern basal risers (U.3 and 5). Stratum 3 was also identified on Str. 107-1st's south flank

where it accumulated to between 0.16-0.39m above S.4 and U.29, covering U.10 and most of U.11 (the platform's second and third southern risers). Covering S.3 on the north is a moderately coarse-textured, hard-compacted, dark brown to gray humus horizon (S.2) that is as much as 0.4m thick. Its counterpart on the south (S.1) overlies S.3 by 0.32-0.51m and consists of a hard-compacted, very coarse-textured, dark brown-to-black soil that contains many small (0.01m in diameter or less) pebbles. Stratum 2 covers Str. 107-1st's north side and laps over the entire summit, pinching out above U.12, the penultimate southern riser ascending to the summit.

A light scattering of rocks fallen from final-phase architecture (F.2) was found embedded in S.1-3 and traced for one meter north of Str. 107-Sub2 and across Str. 107-1st. By-and-large, relatively few stones were found in F.2.