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Edward Schortman

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Site 52

Site 52 lies atop the high terrace in the eastern portion of the Las Huertas/Hondo pocket ca. 365m northwest of Site 51 and 148m west of Site 149. The summit of the low rise supporting Site 52 is relatively flat; rock outcrops, including vesicular basalt, protrude from this diminutive eminence. The perennial Rio Las Huertas is 450m to the north. Site 52 contains 10 structures organized around two adjoining patios (east and west) comprising a tightly nucleated cluster. Structures 52-1 and 5-9 were excavated over the course of June 20-22, 1984 and May 20-24, 1985, a total of 50 person-days of labor resulted in exposing 44.2m². The work was overseen by Patricia Urban, Kathleen McLaren, Edward Schortman, and Julie Miller.

Structure 52-1

Structure 52-1, closing off the southern flank of the eastern patio, is 3.5m southeast of Str. 52-5 and 8m south and across the patio from Str. 52-3. Investigations were conducted via two mutually aligned trenches (Subop. 52I [1x4.7m] and 52J [1x3.86m]) separated by 0.14m of unexcavated terrain. These excavations bisect the building along its approximate axis. Digging was carried down to a maximum depth of 0.8m below ground surface within and below construction and 0.48m below ground surface beyond (west of) construction. A single building phase, encompassing one renovation, was revealed in excavation.

Excavation Lots

<u>Lot</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Date</u>
52I/1		Terminal Debris (Secondary)	?
52I/2	78 sherds 4 lithics	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	?
52I/3	42 <u>bajareque</u> fragments	Occupation Debris (Secondary)	?
52I/4	44 sherds	Occupation Debris (Secondary)	LC
52J/1	45 sherds 1 censer spike 10 <u>bajareque</u> fragments	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	EPC
52J/2	32 sherds	Mixed Terminal Debris (Secondary) And Fill	LC

Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
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1	Str. 52-1-2nd	U.1	S.1,2	-	LC
2	Str. 52-1-1st	U.2-8	-	-	LC, EPC
3	-	-	S.3	F.1	-

Time Span 1

Time Span 1 witnesses the natural deposition of S.1 and 2. The former is a rock-rich colluvial layer above which is a red-brown, greasy clay with numerous stone and bajareque inclusions (S.2). Stratum 1 dips down very gradually from east to west, declining 0.06m over its exposed 1.34m; S.2 descends more precipitously at first, dropping 0.2m over 1.65m before leveling out and running more-or-less even for the remaining 1m it is revealed in excavation. The base of S.1 was not revealed in excavation (it has an exposed thickness of 0.1m); S.2 is 0.32-0.4m thick where it was found to overlie S.1. Both strata were revealed solely under Str. 52-1-1st's summit.

Artifacts recovered from S.2 point to occupation here prior to raising Str. 52-1-1st. Unit 1, a 0.14m-high wall built of angular rocks with their flat faces oriented eastward, may be a remnant of an earlier building (tentatively designated Str. 52-1-2nd) associated with this cultural material. The wall is 0.34m wide and was exposed running 0.95m north-south, stopping 0.3m shy of the north trench wall. Angular gray rocks, including some conglomerates, ranging in size from 0.07x0.16x0.17m to 0.15x0.15x0.24m were used to fashion the wall. Unit 1 is 0.17m above S.1 and is embedded in the upper 0.14m of S.2. Large quantities of small bajareque fragments were noted immediately above and around U.1, suggesting that it once served as a foundation for a perishable upper wall, most likely from a surface-level building. Deposition of U.5 fill completely buried this edifice during TS 2.

Time Span 2

Structure 52-1-1st was erected during this interval, undergoing at least one significant renovation during the span. The building is a low platform apparently built over a gradual (0.26m over 5.2m) west-to-east ascent, based on the stratigraphic relations of U.2 and 3 (the west and east basal facings respectively). The edifice was originally delimited on the east and west by stone walls (U.3 and 2) fashioned of angular rocks with their flatter faces generally oriented outward. Unit 2 rises 0.48m and is ca. 0.5m across, Unit 3 ascends 0.4m and is 0.44m wide. The dense tumble located west of U.2 (F.1) suggests that this facing may once have been significantly taller; very little architectural debris was found associated with any of the eastern facings (U.3 and 7). Unit 2 is backed on the east by a dark brown earth-and-stone fill, covering S.2 by anywhere from 0.1-0.2m (U.5). The fill retained by U.3 on the east is very similar to S.2; a hard-compacted, red-brown, greasy clay, with bajareque fragments and some stones included (U.6). Lying 2.63m east of U.2 is a 0.17-0.26m-high summit wall, ca. 0.7m wide (U.4). Bajareque pieces were commonly found in U.4's vicinity, suggesting that it supported a perishable partition dividing the summit into two, unequal-sized enclosures. Summit floors were earthen. Structure 52-1-1st, at this point, rose 0.4-0.48m high, measured 5.2m across east-west, and sustained at least two earthen floored summit rooms, the western 2.63m across, the eastern

0.95m wide.

At some point during the occupation of Str. 52-1-1st the building was expanded 1.0m to the east. Unit 7 replaced U.3 as the eastern basal facing, though it seems likely that roughly 0.14m of the latter remained projecting above the terrace surface backing U.7 on the west. Unit 7 is 0.26m tall, 0.37m wide, and retains a fill composed of variously sized angular stones set in a dark brown soil matrix. The new eastern facing was built of angular stones with some effort devoted to orienting the flatter faces outward. As a result of these labors, Str. 52-1-1st now measured 6.2m east-west and was ascended via two low terraces on the east.

All Str. 52-1-1st walls are set in a brown mud mortar and consist of angular stones varying in size from 0.08x0.2x0.21m to 0.18x0.2x0.43m; most fall towards the center of that range.

Time Span 3

Following abandonment of Str. 52-1-1st, the building was buried by the natural deposition of a brown, organic rich soil (S.3). A dense concentration of dislodged building stones (F.1) extends for at least 1.05m west of U.2, embedded within S.3. As noted previously, these rocks probably were part of U.2, having fallen from the latter during Str. 52-1-1st's prolonged period of deterioration.

Structure 52-5

Structure 52-5, separating the eastern and western patios, is 3.5m northwest of Str. 52-1 and 8.5m east of (and across the western patio from) Str. 52-9. The building was investigated by two mutually aligned trenches that probed the south (Subop. 52K, 1x2.3m) and north (Subop. 52H, 1x4.28m) flanks. These excavations were located on Str. 52-5's approximate mid-line and were separated by 2.5m of unexcavated terrain. Suboperation 52H was carried down to a maximum depth of 0.62m below ground surface within and below construction and 0.56m below surface north of architecture; Subop. 52K reached a maximum depth of 0.54m below ground surface outside (south of) construction. A single construction phase was revealed during the excavation of Subop. 52H and 52K.

Excavation Lots

<u>Lot</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Date</u>
52H/1	126 sherds 1 piece of obsidian	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC, EPC
52H/2		Mixed Terminal Debris (Secondary) and Preconstruction Materials (Secondary)	?
52H/3	74 sherds	Mixed Terminal Debris (Secondary) and Preconstruction Materials (Secondary)	LC, EPC

52H/4		Mixed Terminal Debris (Secondary) and Preconstruction Materials (Secondary)	?
52H/5	burial	Primary Deposit	?
52H/6	carbon sample	Preconstruction; Associated with the Colluvial Level	?
52K/1	164 sherds 2 pieces of obsidian 1 mano fragment	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	?

Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.1,2	-	-
2	Str. 52-5-1st	U.1-3	-	-	LC, EPC
3	-	-	S.2	F.1,2	-

Time Span 1

Stratum 1, a gravel-rich colluvial level, underlies construction north and south of Str. 52-5-1st. A segment only 0.07m thick of S.1 was revealed to the north; on the south, S.1 rises 0.32m over 2.14m south-north and reaches a maximum exposed thickness of 0.36m. The bottom of S.1 was not encountered in Subop. 52H and 52K. The lower exposed 0.1m of S.2, a coarse-textured, dark brown soil containing increasing quantities of angular gravel as the interface with S.1 is approached, underlies architecture in Subop. 52H. Presumably, this portion of S.2 was laid down prior to the erection of Str. 52-5-1st. No artifacts were clearly associated with S.1, the level having apparently been deposited by natural means prior to significant human occupation at Site 52. The lower segment of S.2 may have contained some artifacts, though mixing of material from pre- and post-construction contexts precludes certainty on this point.

Time Span 2

Structure 52-5-1st was raised during this interval, U.1 and 2 being the surviving remnants of the building's north and south basal facings respectively. Unit 1 is a poorly preserved wall, 0.48m tall and 0.44m (one rock) thick. Backing U.1 on the south is the platform's hearth (U.3), composed of a dark brown, coarse-textured soil in which a few rocks are found. Unit 2, the southern facing, rises 0.45m and is set 0.25m into the upward (south-to-north) slope of S.1.

Units 1 and 2 are composed, by-and-large, of fine-grained, light colored angular stones that range in size from 0.03x0.1m to 0.15x0.3m. These rocks are set in a brown, coarse-textured mud mortar. The 1.58m of summit revealed in Subop. 52H was surfaced with earth; no summit architecture was identified in our limited probes. By the conclusion of TS 2, Str. 52-5-1st was an earth-filled, stone-faced platform standing 0.45-0.48m tall and measuring 5.25m across (north-south).

A tightly flexed burial was recovered 0.29m north and 0.1m below the base of U.1, resting atop S.1. Though incomplete and fragmentary, it was possible to discern that the individual had been lain on their right side, the head oriented almost exactly due west. No artifacts were clearly associated with the interment. Signs of the burial pit were lacking. We currently tend towards the view that the individual in question was interred during TS 2 off the northern edge of Str. 52-5-1st.

Time Span 3

Following abandonment, Str. 52-5-1st was covered by the continued deposition of S.2. Features 1 and 2 consist of displaced stone from U.1 and 2 respectively. Feature 1 extends at least 2.53m north of U.1 while its southern counterpart was found up to 1.8m south of U.2. In neither case was the stone debris particularly dense, suggesting that U.1 and 2 were not much higher than their preserved remnants indicate.

Structure 52-6

Structure 52-6 delimits the western patio's south side, lying 5m south of Str. 52-5 and 1.5m east of Str. 52-8. The building was investigated by means of a 1x3.1m trench (Subop. 52C) located on the building's south flank. Excavation was pursued to a maximum depth of 0.62m outside (south of) construction. A single construction phase was revealed in the course of this work.

Excavation Lots

<u>Lot</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Date</u>
52C/1	47 sherds 1 figurine fragment	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC, EPC
52C/2	117 sherds 1 censer fragment	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC
52C/3	7 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC
52C/4	41 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC
52C/5	26 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC
52C/6	6 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC?

52C/7	23 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC?
52C/8		Terminal Debris (Secondary)	?

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	-	-
2	Str. 52-6-1st	U.1-3	-	-	LC, EPC
3	-	-	S.2,3	F.1,2	-

Time Span 1

Stratum 1 is a very hard-compacted, gravel-rich, colluvial level exposed at the base of excavation underlying Str. 52-6-1st construction. This earth level rises 0.18m south to north over a horizontal distance of 1.02m and was uncovered to a maximum thickness of 0.16m (the base was not encountered). No artifacts were associated with this layer, which seems to have been introduced by natural means prior to significant occupation at Site 52.

Time Span 2

Structure 52-6-1st was erected in this span, U.1-3 being components of its southern architecture. Unit 1 is a 0.46m-high by 0.87m-wide stone construction located 0.27m south and 0.28m downslope from Str. 52-6-1st's southern basal facing (U.2). Unit 1 was not well preserved but plausibly functioned as a low terrace built to retard erosion on the platform's southern, down-sloping flank. This construction rests on and protrudes up to 0.08m into S.1, having been raised over that earth level's south-to-north slope. Backing U.1 to the south is a fill composed of reddish-brown, hard-compacted clay containing some small rocks (U.3 is virtually indistinguishable from S.2). The terrace created by U.1 and 3 is 1.14m wide north-south and gives way to U.2 on the north. The latter is a stone-faced construction that ascends 0.49m above U.3's top and consists of two elements: the main body of the wall, rising 0.25m, and a step-out that projects 0.47m to the south and is 0.24m high. Units 1 and 2 were fashioned of angular stones set in a brown mud mortar. The full height of Str. 52-6-1st was not ascertained.

Time Span 3

After abandonment, Str. 52-6-1st was buried by the natural deposition of S.2, a hard-compacted, reddish brown clay containing some small rocks, and, later, by S.3, a brown, fine-textured, organic rich soil. Features 1 and 2 consist of architectural debris dislodged from U.1 and 2 respectively. Neither extends more than 0.71m from its associated unit and both contain

very few stones. It seems likely, therefore, that U.1 and 2 were not appreciably taller during TS 2 than their preserved remnants suggest.

Structure 52-7

Structure 52-7 is situated on the western margin of the western patio, ca. 1m north of Str. 52-8 and 2m south of Str.52-9. The building was investigated through the excavation of Subop. 52E, a 1x2.4m trench set against the edifice's west side. A 0.8x1.2m extension was dug off the northeast side of Subop. 52E in an effort to locate construction. Excavations were pursued to a maximum depth of 0.4m below ground surface. No clear architecture was revealed during the course of excavation.

Excavation Lots

<u>Lot</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Date</u>
52E/1	74 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC, EPC
52E/2	107 sherds 1 sherd disk	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC
52E/3	40 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC
52E/4	5 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC?
52E/5	36 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC
52E/6		Terminal Debris (Secondary)	?
52E/7	44 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC
52E/8	55 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC

Time Spans

In the absence of clear architectural units, no time spans can be securely defined for Subop. 52E. Two earth levels were encountered, S.1, a hard compacted, reddish-brown clay that contains some stone, which slopes up 0.19m west-to-east over 2.4m. Exposed to a maximum thickness of 0.27m, S.1's base was not revealed. Overlying S.1 by 0.13-0.18m is S.2, a brown, fine-textured, organic rich topsoil. Suboperation 52E probed the western ascent of the small rise supporting Site 52 and was not carried far enough eastward to encounter Str. 52-7. Recovery of artifacts in excavations here indicates that cultural debris was washing downslope over various points in the site's occupation; the paucity of stone debris suggests that construction was located a significant distance east of excavations.

Structure 52-8

Structure 52-8 is 1m south of Str. 52-7 and 1.5m west of Str. 52-6. Suboperation 52F, a 1x1.5m trench, was set against the building's southwest side and carried down to a maximum depth of 0.28m below ground surface. No architecture was encountered in the course of this work.

Excavation Lots

<u>Lot</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Dates</u>
52F/1	49 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC
52F/2	32 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC, EPC
52F/3		Terminal Debris (Secondary)	?

Time Spans

In the absence of architecture, it is not possible to define time spans in Subop. 52F. Stratum 1, a reddish-brown, clay containing some rocks, was exposed to a maximum thickness of 0.14m before disappearing into the base of excavation. Overlying this level by 0.09-0.17m is S.2, a brown, coarse-textured, organic-rich topsoil. A dense concentration of apparently displaced stones was revealed rising upward from south-to-north, extending from S.1 on the south into S.2 on the north (F.1). Feature 1 extends southward beyond excavation limits but stops 0.18m shy of the north trench wall. This collection of jumbled rocks probably represents tumble derived from Str. 52-8. Artifacts found associated with F.1 also are debris likely associated with that building.

Structure 52-9

Structure 52-9 occupies the northwest corner of the western patio, ca. 2m north of Str. 52-7 and 5m northwest of Str. 52-5. Extensive clearing operations conducted here in 1984 exposed roughly 21m² in the course of revealing the entirety of the building's western and eastern basal facings as well as portions of its northern and southern flanks (Subop. 52B and 52D). The summit was not investigated. Excavations were carried down to a maximum depth below ground surface of 0.47m west (Subop. 52D) and 0.48m east (Subop. 52B) of construction.

Excavation Lots

<u>Lot</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Date</u>
52B/1	3 sherds 1 piece of <u>bajareque</u>	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC?

52B/2	17 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC
52B/3	35 sherds	Preconstruction Occupation (Secondary)	LC
52B/4	10 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC
52B/5	17 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC, EPC
52B/6	3 sherds	Preconstruction Occupation (Secondary)	LC
52B/7		Terminal Debris (Secondary)	?
52B/8	23 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC
52B/9	52 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC
52D/1	5 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC?
52D/2	1 sherd	Preconstruction Occupation (Secondary)	?
52D/3	42 sherds	Preconstruction Occupation (Secondary) Mixed with Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC, EPC
52D/4	7 sherds	Preconstruction Occupation (Secondary)	?
52D/5	51 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC
52D/6	23 sherds	Preconstruction Occupation (Secondary) Mixed with Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC, EC
52D/7	36 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC, EC, EPC
52D/8	29 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC
52D/9	30 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC
52D/10		Terminal Debris (Secondary)	?

Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
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1	-	-	S.1	-	EC, LC
2	Str. 52-9-1st	U.1,2	-	-	LC, EPC
3	-	-	S.2	F.1,2	-

Time Span 1

Time Span 1 witnessed the deposition of S.1 east and west of construction. This layer, a reddish brown, hard compacted clay containing numerous small rocks, underlies U.1 and 2 of Str. 52-9-1st. Stratum 1 runs more-or-less level over its exposed extent. Excavations revealed a thickness of 0.12-0.21m for S.1 though its base was not encountered. Recovery of artifacts from this stratum points to occupation in the area predating the uncovered portions of Str. 52-9-1st. The absence of an impermeable boundary separating S.1 from overlying deposits, however, leaves open the possibility that the objects in question percolated down from later occupations. That some of these items dated to the Early Classic, a time period that apparently precedes the span of Str. 52-9-1st's construction and use (Late Classic and Early Postclassic), tends to support claims for human occupation in the area predating TS 2.

Time Span 2

Structure 52-9-1st was raised during this interval. It was a stone-faced platform rising 0.75m on the west (U.1) and 0.46m on the east (U.2). The discrepancy in heights between U.1 and 2 may be due to Str. 52-9-1st's erection over a natural west-to-east ascent. Unit 1 is the more substantial of the two architectural elements, being composed of two segments; an initial riser 0.29m high running back east 0.41m where it is succeeded by a second ascent of 0.46m (similar in form to Str. 52-6-1st's U.2). Access to the summit on the east was by stepping up and over a single vertical riser (U.2). Units 1 and 2 are fashioned using angular rocks varying in size from 0.08x0.1m to 0.23x0.46m with most falling towards the middle of that range (0.18x0.2m). Unit 2 consists of a single course of the larger stones topped by a disturbed course of medium-size rocks; U.1 is arranged in the opposite fashion with a basal level of small to medium-size stones surmounted by larger examples arranged in no clear horizontal courses. Rocks in both facings are set in a dark brown mud mortar.

By the conclusion of TS 2, Str. 52-9-1st stood 0.46-0.75m high and covered 5m east-west by 5.75m north-south (measured across the center). Summit access may have been achieved from either the east or west (the two levels of U.1 possibly acting as steps).

Time Span 3

Structure 52-9-1st was buried by the natural deposition of S.2 following its abandonment. Stratum 2 is a brown, fine-textured, organic-rich topsoil 0.07-0.4m thick above S.1. Stones dislodged from U.1 and 2 (F.1 and 2 respectively) are embedded in S.2. Feature 1 extends 1.71m west of U.1, F.2 is found for only 0.54m east of U.2. Collapsed debris is much denser on the west in F.1 than is the case on the east, suggesting that U.1 may have suffered more from erosion

than its eastern counterpart.

Chronological Summary

The earliest recognized use of Site 52 dates to the Early Classic. A few sherds dating to the above span were recovered during the excavation of Str. 52-9-1st, hinting at a light occupation in the northwest part of the locus at this time. Principal construction and occupation pertains to the Late Classic; it was at this time that all of the excavated buildings were raised and, likely, reached their final forms. Continued, though probably reduced, use of the settlement continued into the Early Postclassic. All investigated buildings were apparently inhabited during the span, though artifacts diagnostic of the period are few in number everywhere at the locus. Site 52 was apparently abandoned by the Late Postclassic and was not subsequently reoccupied.

The proximity of construction to the gravel-rich deposits across the site hints at settlement early on in the formation of soils atop colluvium. Site 52 occupies a low rise on the high terrace and may have been more subject to erosional than depositional processes for much of its history. As seems to be the case with many settlements in the eastern Las Huertas/Hondo pocket, however, occupation at Site 52 was possibly begun soon after landforms had stabilized and before the development of relatively thick soils. At least this seems to be the case for the specific areas occupied by excavated structures (see also Sites 51, 54, 149, 150, and 153).

Architectural Summary

Late Classic construction at Site 52 consists almost exclusively of stone-faced platforms rising a consistent 0.4-0.75m in one (most commonly) or two steps to the summit. Basal facings were fashioned of angular stones ranging in size from 0.08x0.2m to 0.23x0.46m, with most falling towards the middle of that split. There was a general tendency to orient the naturally flatter aspects of rocks outward; all stones were set in a brown mud mortar. Horizontal coursing was rarely attested and chinking stones were not employed to fill in gaps among the larger rocks. Fill was almost invariably of earth with occasional stones mixed in (Str. 52-6-1st, U.3 is an exception as here stones predominate in the fill). Exposed summits supported earth-floored rooms lacking clear built-in furniture. Basal facings and the occasional stone-footed summit partition seem to have sustained perishable (bajareque) upper walls. The three cases where we can reconstruct basal dimensions yield consistent figures of 5m to 5.75m across; Str. 52-1-1st was expanded late in its history to 6.2m wide.

The only surface-level building recognized at Site 52, Str. 52-1-2nd, was defined by a stone foundation 0.14m high by 0.34m across. This building apparently had an earthen floor and was walled with bajareque raised atop the foundation wall. Unfortunately, only a small portion of the edifice was exposed. Succession of surface buildings by platforms at Site 52 may hint at changes in labor control, with more “labor expensive” platforms replacing easier-to-raise surface structures throughout the Late Classic. Additional excavation is needed to determine whether the building sequence at Str. 52-1 is typical of a broader pattern characteristic of the site as a whole.