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PSB OP 153 Excavation Report

Edward Schortman

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Site 153

Site 153, composed of three diminutive structures surrounding a patio, occupies a small shelf of flat land in the Cerro Pena Blanca foothills. The site is on the southwestern margin of the Las Huertas/Hondo pocket, ca. 75m northwest of Site 54 and 150m north of the perennial Rio Juncuntal. Structures 153-2 and 3 were excavated during June 3-5, 1985, involving a total of 12 person-days of labor in exposing 11m². Preservation was good over most of the investigated area though artifact yields were very low. Most materials associated with occupation here were probably jettisoned over the steep escarpment bordering the settlement's western flank. All work at Site 153 was overseen by Colleen Siders and Marie Hamilton.

Structure 153-2

Structure 153-2, occupying the southwest corner of the patio ca. 4m south of Str. 153-3, was investigated by means of two, mutually aligned trenches; Subop. 153B on the east (1x2m) and Subop. 153C on the west (1x4m). A total of 0.76m was left unexcavated between the probes. Maximum depths below modern ground surface of 0.66m and 0.75m were reached on the west and east respectively. A single construction phase was revealed during the course of this work.

Excavation Lots

<u>Lot</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Time Span</u>
153B/1	3 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	2
153B/2	empty	Pre-Construction Soil Deposition	1
153C/1	empty	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	2
153C/2	empty	Preconstruction Soil Deposition	1
153C/2	?	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	2

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. 153-2-1st	U.1-3	-	-	LC?
3	-	-	S.2	F.1,2	-

Time Span 1

Time Span 1 witnessed the deposition of S.1, a light brown, coarse-textured soil containing numerous small angular rocks. Stratum 1 was exposed to a maximum thickness of 0.5m east and 0.34m west of construction, though its base was not encountered in excavation. Stratum 1 drops 0.4m from its highest point on the east to the lowest exposed elevation on the west, suggesting that this earth level's source lies in the former direction. Exposed portions of Str. 153-2 construction (U.1 and 2) are set 0.02-0.12m into S.1, indicating the latter's temporal priority. Stratum 1 appears to be a level of gravel-rich colluvium deposited on the ledge supporting Site 153 from the slopes lying immediately to the east. There is no evidence of cultural activity pertaining to this time span.

Time Span 2

Structure 153-2-1st was built during this interval. The building is a stone-faced platform rising 0.46m and 0.32m above ancient ground surface (the top of S.1) on the west and east respectively. This 0.14m discrepancy in height reflects the aforementioned east-to-west drop-off in ground surface on the ledge summit. Unit 1, the western basal facing, is set 0.12m into S.1 while the eastern platform wall (U.2) intrudes 0.02m into the colluvial level. The exposed units are composed of medium-sized angular chunks of fine-grained, light colored rocks set in a brown earth matrix. Component rocks range from 0.07x0.10m to 0.12x0.47m in size and are not arranged in clear horizontal courses. Some effort was made, however, to orient the flatter rock faces out to the east on U.2. A limited probe into the building's core revealed a mixed dark brown, coarse-textured earth and stone fill (Unit 3); there are slight indications that a stone pavement originally surmounted the edifice. By the end of TS.2, Str. 153-2-1st measured 3.6m east-west, rose 0.32-0.46m in a single step to its summit, and was aligned 185 degrees. The summit itself seems to have measured 3.2m east-west.

Time Span 3

Following abandonment of Str. 153-2-1st, the platform was covered with a dark brown, coarse-textured, organic-rich, soft-compacted soil (Stratum 2). Stratum 2 varies from 0.11-0.38m thick and obscures U.1 and 2. Some stones of the putative summit pavement were protruding up to 0.16m above ground surface prior to excavation. Stratum 2 contains Features 1 and 2, tumbled stones derived from U.1 and 2 respectively. These relatively dense concentrations of architectural debris extend to at least the limits of excavation on the west and east (1.0m and 2.2m respectively). The extent of F.1 and 2 strongly suggest that Str. 153-2-1st's basal walls rose higher than the preserved tops of U.1 and 2.

Structure 153-3

Structure 153-3 is situated on the northwest patio corner, ca. 3m north of Str. 153-2 and 12m northwest of Str. 153-1. The building was investigated by means of two mutually aligned trenches; Subop. 153E (1x2m) on the east and Subop. 153D (1x3m) on the west. Three meters of unexcavated terrain separates the probes. Suboperation 153E was carried to a maximum depth of 0.26m below modern ground surface while Subop. 153D reached 0.68m deep outside (west of) construction and 0.36m within fill. 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>
153D/1	empty	Mixed Terminal Debris (Secondary) Preconstruction Soil Deposition	?
153D/2	?	Mixed Terminal Debris (Secondary) And Fill	?
153E/1	35 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC, EPC

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.153-3-1st	U.1-3	-	-	LC, EPC
3	-	-	S.2	F.1,2	-

Time Span 1

Stratum 1, a light brown, coarse-textured soil containing large quantities of angular gravels, was laid down prior to Str. 153-3-1st's erection. Fully 0.15m intervenes between the base of the platform's western facing and the top of S.1. West of construction, S.1 was exposed to a maximum thickness of 0.3m, disappearing beyond excavation limits. Stratum 1's top is level over an uncovered east-west extent of 1.7m in Subop. 153D (S.1 was not revealed in Subop. 153E). An additional 0.15m of S.2, a dark brown, coarse-textured, organic-rich, loose-compacted soil, underlies platform construction on the west and must have been deposited during this interval. A total of 0.04m of S.2 was found beneath the eastern platform facing, indicating that the lower portion of this earth level probably underlay all Str. 153-3-1st construction.

Time Span 2

Structure 153-3-1st, raised during this interval, is a stone-faced platform rising 0.26m and 0.38m on the east and west respectively. The base of the eastern facing (U.2) sits 0.35m above that of its eastern counterpart (U.1), suggesting that the edifice was built over a west-to-east ascent in natural ground surface. Units 1 and 2 were fashioned using light-colored, fine-textured angular stones set in a dark brown mud matrix and with their flatter faces oriented outwards. Rock sizes range between 0.08x0.10x0.14m to 0.21x0.31x0.58m with most falling out around

0.1x0.18x0.22m. Two horizontal courses were clearly visible in U.2; U.1 survived as only a single level of stone, the remainder having collapsed westward downslope (F.1). Backing U.1 to the east is a fill composed of flat-laid rocks set in a dark brown mud matrix (U.3). Unit 3 was exposed for a maximum distance of 1.0m east of U.1; presumably, further excavation would reveal a continuation of this hearing to U.2 on the east. No prepared summit floor was noted. Overall, Str. 153-3-1st rose at least 0.26-0.38m, measured 4.68m east-west, and was aligned 191 degrees. The summit was achieved simply stepping up and over the basal risers and encompassed 4.13m east-west.

Time Span 3

Following abandonment, Str. 153-3-1st was buried by further deposition of S. 2. This earth level covered all but the uppermost 0.04-0.06m of U.1 and 2. Close similarities in the nature of the soil underlying and burying construction here suggest continuities in depositional environments between pre- and post-construction time spans. Remnants of structural collapse dating to this span were recorded on both building flanks; Feature 1, a moderately dense concentration of stones displaced from U.1, extends at least 1.66m west of the latter facing while F.2 contains far fewer rocks and ends within 0.97m of U.2. These differences support field observations that U.1 had suffered more from erosion than had U.2.

Chronological Summary

The paucity of artifacts recovered from Site 153, along with the absence of materials suitable for radiometric assays, makes determining the settlement's chronological position difficult. Both excavated buildings yielded ceramics that could be assigned, with varying degrees of certainty, to the Late Classic. A very slight Early Postclassic occupation of the locus is also suggested by sherds recovered from Str. 153-3-1st. Identification of the Late Classic as the principal period of use and construction at Site 153 based on ceramic analyses conforms to temporal estimates derived from studies of site form and architecture.

It seems likely that Site 153 was established on relatively unpromising (for agriculture) terrain and so may have been founded towards the end of the Late Classic. Structure 153-2-1st was raised directly atop the rock-rich colluvial deposit underlying the ledge, perhaps implying that formation of finer-grained soils had not progressed very far prior to settlement. Structure 153-3-1st is set in a dark brown, organic rich soil that was at least 0.15m thick at the time of initial construction. This stratigraphic relation suggests that, while some soil had formed atop the colluvium here before occupation, it was very thin and still early in the edaphic process. In general, limited excavations indicate that Site 153's inhabitants pioneered a ledge onto which relatively infertile, gravel-rich soils had only recently ceased washing in from the hills to the east.

Architectural Summary

Both investigated buildings are low platforms, 0.26-0.46m high, faced by basal walls fashioned of light colored, fine-grained angular stones the flatter faces of which are generally, though not invariably, oriented outwards. All rocks are set in a brown mud mortar; chinking stones are rarely recorded and only one facing, Str. 153-3-1st, U.2, showed clear evidence of

horizontal coursing. Maximum platform dimensions, measured east-west, were 3.6m and 4.68m, and the structures were similarly aligned at 185 and 191 degrees. Summits were attained in each case by a direct ascent from ground surface over the basal wall and encompassed 3.2m and 4.13m east-west. Excavations were insufficient to determine the existence of built-in features, such as benches. While Str. 153-2-1st may have been surmounted by a stone floor, Str. 153-3-1st was not. Both platforms had cores composed of stones mixed with earth.