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## PSB OP 020 Excavation Report

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## Site 20

Site 20, occupying the eastern edge of the low terrace on the west Gualjoquito vega, lies ca. 475m west of the river and 600m west of and directly across the Rio Ulua from Gualjoquito (Site 1). The 29 constructions comprising Site 20 are divided into two clusters, neither of which evinces a clear patio focus. The northern group contains 20 constructions (Strs. 20-1 through 18, F. 1 and 2), the southern, 96m distant from the aforementioned aggregate, has eight structures (Strs. 20 to 27), while Str. 20-19 lies roughly half-way between the clusters. Structures 20-1 and 19 along with F. 1 were eroding eastward over the terrace margin in 1985 and it is possible that Site 20 formerly included buildings that have long ago washed downslope. A total of five constructions (Strs. 20-9, 18, 19, 20, and 26) were excavated at Site 20 by a crew of six men over the course of five days in April, 1985. A total of 30 person-days of labor resulted in the exposure of ca. 31m<sup>2</sup> at Site 20. Preservation was poor on the investigated edifices, largely the result of systematic stone-robbing carried out to prepare fields for planting. It was, consequently, difficult to identify architecture in many cases and relate cultural materials to building phases. All of the work conducted at Site 20 was overseen by T. Johnson and E. Schortman.

### Structure 20-9

Structure 20-9, located on the east side of the congested north group, was investigated by means of a 3.1m-long, 1m-wide trench set against the platform's north flank (Subop. 20G). This probe, carried down to a maximum depth of 0.41m north of construction, revealed a single construction phase.

### Excavation Lots

<u>Lot</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Time Span Date</u>
20G/1	182 sherds	Occupation Debris (Secondary)	1,2/LC
20G/2	13 sherds 1 censer fragment	Occupation Debris (Secondary)	1,2/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	-	LC?
2	Str. 20-9-1st	U.1	-	-	LC, EPC?
3	-	-	S.1	F.1	-

### Time Span 1

Time Span 1 witnessed the deposition of the lower 0.08-0.18m of S.1, a light brown, fine-textured, moderately hard-compacted soil. Stratum 1's full thickness is not known as its base was not uncovered during the 1985 excavations. The portions of S.1 underlying construction (U.1) contain some artifacts, indicating that the eventual site of Str. 20-9-1st was occupied prior to the raising of the latter edifice.

### Time Span 2

Structure 20-9-1st was raised during this interval. Time, and the poor state of the building's preservation, limited investigations to the platform's northern basal facing (U.1). Unit 1 is a cobble wall that stood a reconstructed 0.3m high and was aligned ca. 85°30'. Vesicular basalt cobbles predominate in the limited portion of U.1 exposed in Subop. 20G. The stones are fairly large, ca. 0.26x0.4m, and are set in a brown mud mortar. A single horizontal course was tentatively discerned in U.1 but chinking stones are absent. The summit's disrupted appearance discouraged further investigation of the building.

### Time Span 3

Following abandonment, Str. 20-9-1st was largely buried by the continued deposition of S.1. Lack of a break in color, texture, and compaction throughout the exposed depth of S.1 suggests that the same overall environmental conditions affecting soil formation processes pertained prior to and following Str. 20-9-1st's construction. Included in upper S.1 is a moderately dense concentration of disturbed building debris (F.1). Feature 1, containing small to medium-sized cobbles, extends 2.52m north of U.1, stone density declining rapidly with distance from the platform. The base of F.1 declines 0.18m over this distance, indicating that U.1 might have been originally built atop a low north-to-south rise. The density of stones found in F.1 confirms our general impression that Str. 20-9-1st was significantly disturbed after TS.2.

### Structures 20-18 and 19

Structures 20-18 and 19 are two long, low, parallel platforms situated on the southeast margin of the north structure cluster. The form, shared orientation, and pairing of these buildings implied that they defined a ballcourt, the only potential example of this common Mesoamerican architectural pattern known in the middle Ulua basin outside Gualjoquito. To test this proposition, Subop. 20F, a 12m east-west by 1m north-south trench, was dug across the presumed alley, intersecting the center-points of the eastern and western flanking platforms (Strs. 20-18 and 19 respectively). Digging was carried down to a maximum depth of 0.86m outside architecture revealing remnants of a single construction phase on Str. 20-18. No clear architectural remains were discernible on Str. 20-19.

### Excavation Lots

Time Span/

<u>Lot</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Date</u>
20F/1	23 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary), Str. 20-18-1st	1/-
20F/2	9 sherds	Mixed Fill and Terminal Debris, Str. 20-18-1st	1/-
20F/3	40 sherds 4 censer fragments 3 obsidian pieces	Disturbed Context, Fill and Occupation Debris mixed by rodent activity, Str. 20-18-1st	1/-
20F/4	53 sherds 2 <u>bajareque</u> frags. 5 <u>jute</u> shells	Mixed Fill and Terminal Debris, Str. 20-18-1st	1/EPC
20F/5	6 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary), between Strs. 20-18-1st and 20-19-1st	1/?
20F/6	artifacts	Terminal Debris (Secondary), between Strs. 20-18-1st and 20-19-1st	1/-
20F/7	22 sherds 2 freshwater shells	Terminal Debris (Secondary), Str. 20-19-1st	1/LC
20F/8	27 sherds	Mixed Fill and Terminal Debris, Str. 20-18-1st	1/-

### Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	Str. 20-18-1st	U.1,2	-	-	LC, EPC?
2	-	-	S.1	F.1	-

### Time Span 1

The only fragments of Str. 20-18-1st revealed in Subop. 20F are U.1 and 2. The former is a fill unit composed of a few scattered rocks (mostly found east of U.2), but made up primarily of orange-brown, fine-textured, hard-compacted soil. Unit 1 slopes down rapidly from east to west, dropping 0.4m over a horizontal distance of 1.24m. It may be that this descent marks the putative alley's eastern sloping zone. Unit 2, sitting well up within and partially buried by U.1, is a cobble wall, standing a reconstructed 0.23m high by 0.47m thick and backed on the east by a

continuation of U.2. Unit 2's alignment is, very approximately, 171°0'. Though far from obvious, it may well be that U.2 is the remnant of a vertical zone that originally surmounted a sloping earthen element (U.1). The rocks comprising U.2 are primarily vesicular basalt river cobbles, measuring 0.13x0.2m to 0.18x0.2m, set in a brown mud mortar. No coursing or chinking stones were noted nor was there much effort expended in placing the flatter aspects of the rocks outward.

We hypothesize that the western flank of the putative court was similarly constructed. Unfortunately, the absence of clear architecture in the limited segment of Str. 20-19-1st probed by Subop. 20F precludes making any definitive statements to this effect. Very tentatively, however, architectural patterns uncovered on Str. 20-18-1st support the identification of Strs. 20-18-1st and 20-19-1st as a ballcourt.

### Time Span 2

Following abandonment, both buildings were almost completely buried by the deposition of S.1, a brown, fine-textured, hard-compacted soil. The disrupted stone debris found in the excavated segment of Str. 20-19-1st is encompassed within F.1. Cavities created by the decomposition of tree roots and abandoned rodent burrows were especially prevalent in the area of F.1 and are undoubtedly responsible for some of the destruction seen here.

### Structure 20-20

Structure 20-20, rising 3.75m, is the largest platform recorded on the west Gualjoquito vega. This edifice perches atop the eastern terrace margin, on the east edge of the southern structure cluster, and faces eastward towards Gualjoquito (Site 1). In fact, Str. 20-20 seems to be paired with a comparably large platform in the latter center, Str. 1-22, implying that activities carried out on both monumental edifices were somehow related. Structure 20-20 was investigated by means of three distinct trenches set in line with each other along the building's approximate east-to-west center-line. The eastern and western basal facing were probed by Subop. 20E and B respectively while the summit was investigated via Subop. 20D, a 1m north-south by 2m east-west trench dug to a maximum depth of 2m into construction fill revealing, minimally, two construction phases. Fully 11.6m<sup>2</sup> were excavated during the course of studying Str. 20-20. Preservation on Str. 20-20 was generally poor, especially on the west flank where stone robbing apparently destroyed much final-phase architecture.

### Excavation Lots

<u>Lot</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Time Span/Date</u>
20B/1	75 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	2/-
20D/1	artifacts	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	2/-
20D/2	81 sherds	Fill	2/LC, EC, LPrec

20D/3	artifacts	Fill	2/-
20D/4	artifacts	Fill	2/-
20D/5	artifacts	Fill	2/-
20E/1	7 sherds	Occupation Debris (Secondary)	1,2/-
20E/2	40 sherds 3 lithics 1 groundstone frag.	Mixed Terminal Debris and Fill	2/EPC
20E/3	36 sherds 2 censer frags. 5 <u>bajareque</u> frags.	Mixed Terminal Debris and Fill	2/EPC
20E/4	artifacts	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	2/-
20E/5	artifacts	Fill	2/-
20E/6	102 sherds 15 <u>bajareque</u> frags. 1 bone frag.	Fill	2/LC
20E/7	25 sherds 1 censer frag.	Fill	2/LC

### 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. 20-20-1st	U.1-12	-	F.1	LC, EC, EPC, Lprec.
3	-	-	S.1	F.2	-

### Time Span 1

The lower 0.12m of S.1, exposed in Subop. 20E on the platform's west side, underlies Str.

20-20-1st construction (U.2) and so must predate that building effort. Stratum 1 is a dark brown, fine-textured, hard-compacted soil. Excavations were not carried very far into S.1 with the result that the layer's base was not encountered and there is insufficient data to establish the existence of human occupation preceding erection of Str. 20-20-1st.

### Time Span 2

Structure 20-20-1st is a massive earth-and-stone-filled platform faced with stone on the east and west. Investigation of the eastern flank was limited to exposing the building's basal wall, a cobble unit standing a reconstructed 0.55m high (U.1). Unit 1 is built primarily of vesicular basalt cobbles, set in a brown mud mortar, and with their flatter faces oriented outwards (one of the exposed rocks may have been artificially modified to create a more vertical aspect). A single horizontal course survives, the larger rocks (0.26-0.47m in diameter) surrounded by a few chinking stones. What construction succeeded U.1 further upslope remains unknown though the wall's height suggests that it did *not* serve as an access feature. On the west, five cobble-faced terraces (U.2-6) were reconstructed from fragmentary remains mounting in increments of 0.22-0.3m towards the summit. The terrace surfaces vary from earth (U.2) to earth mixed with stone (the remainder) and ranged from 0.7-1.7m across. Units 2-6 were set in and backed by a fill of dark brown earth, identical to S.1, in which a few stones are found (U.7). Underlying U.7 and the exposed western terrace is a fill of orange-brown, fine-textured, hard-compacted soil with very few included rocks (U.8). Unit 8 slopes down precipitously from east-to-west, dropping 1m over a horizontal distance of 3.2m.

No clear superstructure construction was revealed in Subop. 20D. Feature 1, an irregular cobble surface 0.06-0.14m thick and situated 0.24-0.3m below ground surface, may be the remnants of an ultimate summit floor. The stones comprising F.1 were so dispersed, however, that we could not be certain of the "pavement's" validity. Underlying F.1 is an earth fill indistinguishable (U.9) from S.1 (comparable to U.7 supporting the western risers). Located 0.19-0.26m beneath F.1 is a somewhat more convincing cobble surface (U.10) associated with several fragments of bajareque, one of which still bore traces of red paint. Unit 10 runs more-or-less level across Subop. 20D, is 0.1-0.22m thick, and is set within the lower portion of U.9. Though not established, it seems likely that U.10 is a floor for the penultimate superstructure, the latter's walls most likely fashioned of clay set over a wooden framework. Immediately beneath U.10 the nature of the fill changes (U.11). Unit 11 is an orange-brown, fine-textured, hard-compacted soil in which a number of variably sized cobbles, some quite large, are included (note the similarity in the soils comprising U.8 and 11). Unit 11 was exposed to a maximum thickness of 1.15m. Its base was not, however, encountered in our summit probe. Unit 12 is a rough surface of large cobbles situated 0.33-0.45m below the U.9/11 interface. The significance of this "surface" remains uncertain. It appears too irregular to have been a formal pavement. More likely, U.12 marks a break in fill units or was introduced to enhance the stability of the overlying, largely earthen, construction hearting.

Overall, Str. 20-20-1st is a platform standing roughly 3.75m high, measuring ca. 21.5m east-west, and aligned roughly 10 degrees (based on the limited exposure of U.1). The building's summit originally supported a perishable superstructure, the walls of which most likely rose above a stone pavement. The Subop. 20D summit probe revealed evidence for two superimposed superstructure versions (U.10 and F.1). It is not possible to determine at present whether these refurbishings of the summit were related to major modifications made elsewhere

on the structure. For the moment, therefore, all construction efforts identified during excavation are included in TS.2.

### Time Span 3

Following Str. 20-20-1st's abandonment the platform was largely buried by the deposition of S.1. The similar nature of S.1 found below and above construction suggests that the depositional environment changed very little during the long span over which this earth level was laid down. Feature 2, a light scattering of cobbles included in S.1, extends 1.62m east of U.1, the edifice's eastern basal facing. Presumably, these stones represent displaced building material fallen from Str. 20-20-1st after TS.2. The paucity of tumbled architectural debris belies the generally poor state of Str. 20-20-1st's preservation in the areas excavated. Most likely, much final phase architecture has been dismantled and redeposited in the many stone piles that dot Site 20 and the western low terrace generally.

### Structure 20-26

Structure 20-26 is a 1m-high terrace lying ca. 3m east and slightly downslope from Str. 20-20. This edifice was investigated by means of Subop. 20C, a 4.3m east-west by 1m north-south trench dug into the terrace's east face. Excavations were carried down to a maximum depth of 0.5m below modern ground surface and revealed no sign of construction whatsoever. Two superimposed soil levels were revealed. An upper stratum, roughly 0.2m thick, is composed of dark brown, fine-textured, hard-compacted soil (S.2). The lower level continues into the base of Subop. 20C and is characterized by an orange-brown, fine-textured, hard-compacted earth (S.1). Very few stones were found during these investigations and none were in positions that could be construed as parts of formal architecture. Platform fill noted at Site 20 and elsewhere in the middle Ulua drainage often resembles S.1 and it may be that this level was part of the original Str. 20-26 construction. In the absence of supporting data, however, the above is only a tentative surmise. As noted elsewhere, stone-robbing is a common process at Site 20 and may have resulted in dismantling Str. 20-26. We are at a loss to account for Str. 20-26 as the result of natural processes and continue to see it as a terrace fronting Str. 20-20-1st on the east.

### Excavation Lots

<u>Lot</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Date</u>
20C/1	artifacts	Mixed Terminal Debris and Fill (?)	EPC (?)

### Chronological Summary

Occupation of Site 20 seems to extend back to the Early Classic and Late Preclassic. This inference is based on the recovery of sherds diagnostic of these early spans from Str. 20-20-1st fill. The paucity of these fragments in Site 20 excavations hints at a fairly small early settlement in and around Site 20. All of the excavated buildings for which there is sufficient information were apparently raised during the Late Classic and this seems to be the site's

principal occupation period. Nevertheless, every investigated edifice apparently continued in use through the Early Postclassic. Materials dating to this late span were especially prevalent on and near Str. 20-20-1st which may have continued to be a focus of activity well after its Late Classic construction date. There is no evidence that Site 20 supported human habitation in the Late Postclassic and early Historic periods.

### Architectural Summary

All uncovered architecture is assigned to the Late Classic with the possible exception of Str. 20-26 which cannot be dated at present. The investigated buildings are platforms of varying heights composed of earth-and-stone cores faced with cobble walls. Vesicular basalt was the most common stone type comprising these units. Basal walls range from 0.3-0.55m high and are built of cobbles ranging from 0.13x0.2m to 0.47x0.47m. Rocks were generally placed with their naturally flatter faces oriented outward, though this was not always the case. Only one artificially modified stone was recorded, in Str. 20-20-1st's U.1. Formal access features were limited to the five terraces reconstructed on Str. 20-20-1st's west flank (U.2-6). These units rise 0.22-0.3m high, are 0.7-1.7m wide, and are built using a combination of stone and earth. Structure alignments cluster within the range from 85°30' to 100°0'. Superstructures were generally not investigated during 1985. The single example partially revealed at Site 20 is atop Str. 20-20-1st and was built of perishable material rising above a stone floor. Interestingly, there is some evidence that at least portions of the penultimate Str. 20-20-1st summit walls were painted red. The putative ballcourt, defined by Strs. 20-19-1st and 20-18-1st, may have been characterized by earthen sloping zones surmounted by low, vertical cobble walls (U.2, Str. 20-18-1st, is 0.23m high). Lack of time and poor preservation of the component buildings frustrates any effort to be more specific concerning the form and dimensions of this construction. Early Postclassic occupation of Site 20 is apparently characterized by continued use of extant buildings. No construction clearly dating to this interval has been identified at Site 20.