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PSB OP 021 Excavation Report

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Site 21

Site 21 lies roughly midway between Sites 20 (91m to the north) and 22 (88m south) on the eastern edge of the low Ulua terrace in the west Gualjoquito vega. The only construction found at the locus is a line of cobbles running 2.5m northeast-southwest and set flush with modern ground surface (F.1). Artifacts are scattered thinly over the site, though a dense concentration of lithic debris, mostly andesite and some obsidian, encompassing 90m² was noted ca. 125m southeast of F.1 on the terrace edge. The latter concentration is one of the few indications of specialized stone tool production recognized during survey, and excavations were initiated here to ascertain the nature, intensity, and duration of lithic manufacture at this location within the western vega.

Two trenches, each 10.3m long by 1m wide, were laid out bisecting the lithic scatter, intersecting at what we thought, based on surface evidence, was the center of the debris scatter. Suboperation 21B was aligned 167° while Subop. 21C had an orientation of 76°. These suboperations were selectively excavated in 1x1m units, each of which was carried down in 0.2m arbitrary levels (soil changes were subtle and difficult to recognize during digging and there were no clear cultural features that could be used to define stratigraphic breaks). The 1x1m units at the ends of each trench were dug as were two blocks at the junction of Subops. 21B and 21C, i.e., the center block of 21B and the 1x1m unit adjoining it to the west in 21C. In this way we hoped to define the production locale's limits and determine the interval over which tools were fashioned at this site by probing the apparent middle of the concentration. Digging was pursued to a depth of 0.4m at Subops. 21B and 21Cs' limits, at which point artifact yields had declined markedly, while in the center of Subop. 21B excavation continued down 1.1m. Earth from all excavations was screened. Two crews of two men each worked for four days (16 person-days of labor) exposing 6m² of deposits. The investigations were supervised by T. Johnson and E. Schortman.

Excavation Lots

<u>Lot</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Time Span/ Date</u>
21B/1	51 sherds 1 obsidian piece 55 lithic frags.	Occupation Debris (Secondary)	2/EPC
21B/2	artifacts	Occupation Debris (Secondary)	1/-
21B/3	18 sherds 37 obsidian pieces 1,408 lithic frags.	Occupation Debris (Secondary)	2/-
21B/4	4 sherds 2 obsidian pieces 59 lithic frags.	Occupation Debris (Secondary)	1/?

21B/5	7 sherds	Occupation Debris (Secondary)	2/LC?
21B/6	6 sherds	Occupation Debris (Secondary)	1/-
21B/7	artifacts	Occupation Debris (Secondary)	1/-
21C/1	artifacts 1 obsidian piece 41 lithic frags.	Occupation Debris (Secondary)	2/-
21C/2	5 sherds	Occupation Debris (Secondary)	1/-
21C/3	53 sherds 18 obsidian pieces 249 lithic frags.	Occupation Debris (Secondary)	2/-
21C/4	artifacts	Occupation Debris (Secondary)	1/-
21C/5	artifacts	Occupation Debris (Secondary)	2/-
21C/6	artifacts	Occupation Debris (Secondary)	1/-
21C/7	artifacts	Occupation Debris (Secondary)	1/-

Time Spans

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

Time Span 1

Time Span 1 is marked by the deposition of S.1, a reddish-brown, fine-textured, hard-compacted earth extending from 0.3m below present ground surface into the base of excavation. Stratum 1 is increasingly mottled with light gray flecks at greater depths. The lower 0.1m of S.2, a light brown, fine-textured, hard-compacted soil, was also deposited in this interval over S.1. A light scatter of artifacts, including lithic debris, was recovered from these deposits suggesting a relatively small occupation somewhere in the immediate area. No architecture was associated with this span.

Time Span 2

The upper 0.2m of Stratum 2 contains the vast majority of artifacts recovered from the locus, including the preponderance of all lithic debris. Probes on the extremes of Subops. 21B and 21C uncovered relatively few artifacts while those placed at the intersection of the two

trenches yielded much larger quantities of remains, especially lithics (as few as 280 lithic fragments per excavated m² on the edges as opposed to as much as 7,225 pieces per excavated m³ in the center). It appears, therefore, that the lithic scatter was originally restricted to the 90m² area inferred from survey data. Most of the recovered material was andesite debitage and broken tools. This finding confirms inferences, based on analyses of Site 21 surface collections, that the lithic concentration resulted from manufacturing and not the use of stone tools in some other activities. The shallow nature of the deposit, most material being found within the uppermost 0.2m, also implies that tool production was probably carried out in the vicinity of this locale over a relatively short span. Lithic fragments had all but disappeared by a depth of 0.6m in the deposit's center, though ceramics are found in small numbers in this and lower levels. Plowing has most likely disrupted the Site 21 lithic scatter. This alone, however, cannot explain why stone tools and debitage are concentrated so close to ground surface while sherds continue to be found at greater depths. It appears, therefore, that fabrication of stone implements was a short-lived but intense activity at Site 21.

The behavioral significance of the lithic scatter remains unclear. We are inclined to interpret it as trash jettisoned from a nearby production site rather than an *in situ* manufacturing locale. This view is based on several lines of evidence. No constructions were uncovered in Subops. 21B and 21C nor were any but F.1 noted on the surface in the immediate vicinity of the deposit. It seems likely, therefore, that the materials unearthed in the Site 21 excavations were redeposited well away from residences. The dangerous nature of lithic debitage, a hazard to people walking by in bare feet or in sandals, also argues for the interpretation of the excavated deposit as trash safely removed from heavily trafficked areas (Santley and Kneebone 1993). From whence this material derived remains unknown. Such detritus would probably not have been transported a considerable distance and the original production site is probably close-by. It may well be the case that the seemingly open area between two major population nodes, Sites 20 and 22, was set aside for stone tool production conducted by the residents of one or both of those settlements. The manufacturing process would, therefore, not have to compete for space with domestic tasks within highly congested settled areas and its byproducts would not pose a threat to other site occupants.

Chronological Summary

Dating the excavated deposit is complicated by the paucity of temporally diagnostic items recovered from Subops. 21B and 21C and the stratigraphic mixing caused by plowing. Very few sherds were unearthed in our diggings here and no material suitable for radiometric assessments was forthcoming. At present, it looks as though occupation predating the most intensive period of stone implement manufacture pertains to the Late Classic (TS.1). Material pertaining to this span was found below the dense lithic debris concentrated in the uppermost 0.2m of Subops. 21B and 21C (TS.2). The latter material was associated with both Late Classic and Early Postclassic diagnostics. It seems most likely, for the moment at least, that the earlier material found with the dense stone tool debris is a result of mixing brought on by plowing and that implement production flourished at Site 21 during the Early Postclassic. Specialized fashioning of stone tools may have begun at Site 21 during the Late Classic as some debitage is associated with sherds of this period in the 0.2-0.4m levels. As noted earlier, by far the vast majority of the debris is concentrated in the 0-0.2m layer, implying that manufacturing volumes and intensities increased near the end of Site 21's occupation in the Early Postclassic.

