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PVN Op 444 Excavation Report

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1Site 444

Site 444 lies ca. 75m south-southeast of a 40m high southeastern spur of Cerro de Magdalena within the Sierra de Omoa. A seasonal affluent of the Quebrada Danta (also called Quebrada Puente Quemada) is 100m to the northeast while Sites 441 and La Sierra are 300m and 3.35km to the east-southeast, respectively. The terrain on which Site 444 was built slopes up gradually from east to west; the land also rises in a gentle ascent from south to north beneath Site 444 before dropping off towards the stream channel. The eight surface-visible constructions that make up Site 444 are clustered around a patio. Six of these buildings were investigated from March 27-May 11, 1995; Strs. 444-1, 2, 3, and 4 were completely cleared whereas Strs. 444-7 and 8 were sufficiently exposed to allow reconstruction of their basal dimensions and some inferences regarding superstructure form. Twelve pits were also dug; three in the patio, the remainder in a line running north of the settlement towards the quebrada. These tests measure 1m on a side and were designed to locate activity areas undetected on ground surface. Fully 235m² were cleared in the course of this work all of which was overseen by B. Guizzetti and F. Bender.

Structure 444-1

Structure 444-1, the largest building at Site 444, closes off the western patio flank and is 2.2m southwest of Str. 444-2 and 3.9m northwest of Str. 444-7. Most of the area separating Str. 444-1 from these edifices is filled with constructions that do not protrude above ground surface. The land surrounding this edifice rises 0.35m over 10m east-to-west, though there is good reason to believe that the original ground surface on which Str. 444-1-1st was erected ascended ca. 0.55m over 10m in this direction (see TS.2). Digging carried out within Subops. 444A, E, F, and O exposed ca. 74.8m², completely revealing the core platform and an addition appended to that construction's southern face. Excavations were carried down to a maximum depth of 0.76m beneath modern ground surface outside construction (architectural fill was not probed) revealing a single building phase. F. Bender directed all field investigations of Str. 444-1.

Time Spans

| Time Span | Construction Phase | Units | Strata | Features | Date |
|-----------|--------------------|---------|--------|----------|------|
| 1 | - | - | S.1 | - | |
| 2 | Str. 444-1-1st | U.1-23 | - | - | |
| 3 | Str. 444-1-1st | U.24-28 | - | F.1 | |
| 4 | - | - | S.1 | F.2 | - |

Time Span 1

At least 0.37m of S.1, a fine-textured, hard-compacted, very drak grayish brown soil

(10YR 3/2) was laid down before Str. 444-1-1st's construction (S.1's base was not encountered). Artifacts were found throughout this depth save in the lowest exposed ca. 0.05m; whether cultural material might have been retrieved at greater depths is unknown. All we can say at present is that the cultural materials retrieved from S.1 beneath TS.2 architecture point to a human presence in the immediate area while this soil was being laid down.

Time Span 2

Structure 444-1-1st is a stone-faced platform that is bounded on all sides by basal facings (U.1-4) that stand 0.32-0.4m high. All of these elements, save U.4 on the south, define straight lines. Unit 4 runs 3.1m east from the platform's southwest corner at which point it jogs 0.75m south before continuing eastward to the southeast corner. This dog-leg may be a late addition, U.4 originally having extended without changes in direction between the two southern corners. This interpretation is tentatively suggested by the relationship between U.4 and 1 (the eastern facing). Such a change might have been made to accommodate construction of Room 3 which occupies southern extension. A 1.1-1.43m-wide stone-and-earth-paved terrace backs the eastern basal facing on the building's patio-facing side (all included in U.1). A 0.3-0.8m wide terrace backs U.2 on the north; this entity narrows where it borders Room 1, expanding considerably over its westernmost 3.3m. The northern terrace is bounded by U.8 (Room 1's northern foundation, see below) on the east and U.19, a 0.2m-high step-up to the summit, on the west. On the remaining sides, U.3 and 4 ascend directly to the summit.

Structure 444-1-1st's summit is divided into two segments of unequal size: a narrow eastern portion (1.8m across) and a much wider western component (3.7m across). Four rooms make up Str. 444-1-1st's superstructure, bounded by 0.1-0.46m-high by 0.21-0.5m-wide stone footings (U.8, 9, 16, 17, 20-22). Three of these chambers are set in a north-south line atop the eastern summit. The central enclosure, Room 2, is open to the east, overlooking the U.1 terrace and the patio. The compartment is fronted in this direction by two steps (U.5 and 11) the stone risers of which are 0.08m and 0.11m high, respectively. Unit 5's earth-and-stone tread is 0.41m wide. Room 2's earthen floor covers 1.16x1.75m, much of the compartment is taken up by a 0.34m-high stone-faced and -surfaced L-shaped bench (U.12). Unit 12 takes up the entirety of Room 2's western and southern walls, its principal "leg" measuring 0.56m by 1.75m north-south. A 0.68m-wide (north-south) projection extending 0.6m east from the leg's southern terminus. Unit 13 rises 0.26m above U.12 on the west, marking the eastern edge of Str. 444-1-1st's western summit. Room 3 lies immediately south of Room 2 and is bounded on the east by a 0.11m-high step-up (a southern continuation of U.5) from the U.1 terrace. The stone-paved floor (U.23) of this compartment encompasses 1x1.85m. A 0.35m-wide gap in Room 3's southwest corner (where U.4 turn south) may have helped ventilate the enclosure's interior. Room 1 is the northernmost member of this triad. Like its southern analogues, it, too, is open to the east over U.1; unlike Rooms 2 and 3, however, no step intervenes between the terrace and Room 1's earthen-floored interior. The latter measures 1.2x1.85m and lacks built-in furniture. As implied in the above descriptions, Rooms 1-3 all rest at slightly different levels; Room 2's floor is 0.19m above that of Room 1 and it is 0.08m higher than Room 3's floor.

The 1.05-1.1m separating Rooms 1 and 2 is filled with a staircase composed of three stone-faced risers (a northern continuation of U.5, U.6 and 7) that ascend a total of ca. 0.4m above the U.1 terrace in increments of 0.1-0.15m. The basal tread (between U.5 and 6) is 1m across whereas the second ascending step measures 0.85m across. The U.5-7 stairs lead directly

to Room 4 on the western summit. This chamber's earthen floor covers 1.1x1.6m and is set ca. 0.1m below the level of the western summit surface. Room 4 is bounded on the north and west by stone footings (U.17 and 16) while its southern margin is delimited by a stone-faced and -surfaced bench (U.14). Unit 14 extends 1.9-2.7m south from Room 4 to the platform's southern margin (U.4) and runs 1.99m west from U.13, the ascent that defines Room 2's western boundary. Overall, Unit 14 stands 0.26m high on the east and west and 0.36m on the north where it faces into Room 4; U.14 encompasses 4.9m². The 0.6m and 1.24m of summit lying north of Room 4 (between U.17 and 19) and west of U.14's western margin (U.15) are open. In general, the western summit is approximately 0.5m above its eastern counterpart. As noted earlier, however, not all portions of the western summit are on the same level, Room 4 being set roughly 0.1m lower than the surrounding surfaces.

Structure 444-1-1st is a stone-faced platform standing 1.15m high on the east and 0.6m on the west. This 0.55m discrepancy owing to the building's construction over an east-to-west natural rise. By TS.2's conclusion, the edifice measured 6.5x6.65m (including U.4's southern jog) and was oriented roughly 349 degrees. A 0.3-0.8m-wide terrace extends back from Str. 444-1-1st's northern basal facing while a 1.1-1.43m-wide terrace fronts the edifice on its eastern, patio-facing side. The superstructure is divided into 1.8m-wide eastern and 3.7m-wide western segments. The former contains three enclosures arranged in a north-south line, each open over the broad eastern terrace. The central compartment (Room 2) is reached by means of two low steps, 0.11 and 0.12m high, from the eastern terrace. Its earthen floor covers 2m² and supports an L-shaped bench built against the western and southern foundations. The bench's long element measures 0.56m across and runs 1.75m north-south, a 0.68m-wide projection extending 0.6m east from the former's southern end. A 0.26m-high step-up rises above the bench and marks the eastern limit of the western summit. Room 3, immediately south of Room 2, has a 0.11m-high step leading up from the eastern terrace. The chamber's stone-paved surface covers 1.9m². A 0.35m-wide gap in Room 3's southwest corner possibly served to ventilate the compartment's interior. Room 1, at the northern terminus of the line, is on the same level as the eastern terrace, its 2.2m² earthen-floored interior containing no built-in furniture. A formal staircase, rising 0.4m by means of three low risers, provides passage between the eastern and western summits. These steps fill the 1.05-1.1m between Rooms 1 and 2, the width narrowing slightly from east to west. Room 4 lies at the western end of the stairs, its earthen-floored interior covering 1.8m² and set approximately 0.1m below the level of the rest of the western summit. A large stone-faced and -surfaced bench stands 0.36m above Room 4 on the south. This entity encompasses 4.9m² and rises 0.26m above the rest of the western summit. Structure 444-1-1st's western summit is 0.5m higher than its eastern analogue. Even within these respective zones there are discrepancies in altitude: Room 2's floor is 0.19m above that of Room 1 and 0.08m higher than its Room 3 counterpart while Room 4 is set 0.1m below the rest of the western summit.

All facings, foundations and floors are made from a combination of unmodified quartz rocks and schist slabs, some of the latter possibly having been worked to create vertical faces. In general, schist slabs predominate in floors, such as the U.23 pavement found in Room 3; U.3, 4, 8, 13, 15, 16, and 19 are fashioned primarily of quartz. The schist slabs are almost always laid flat in the constructions where they are found. The single noted exception is at the base of U.17 where the slabs forming the basal course are set vertically. Rock sizes range from 0.05m to over 0.3m on their longest dimension, with most falling at or above 0.15m on this measure. The naturally flatter aspects of the quartz stones are directed outwards as are the (possibly) modified

faces of the schist slabs. A brown mud mortar is used as a binding agent in all units.

Time Span 3

During this interval, a 0.25m-high (on the east) platform was appended to Str. 444-1-1st's southern face. This construction is bounded by cobble facings (U.25 and 26) that ascend directly to the summit. The eastern basal wall (U.26) intersects U.4, 1.9m west of the core platform's southeast corner and extends 3.75m south to its junction with U.25. The latter was traced for 2.6m to the west before excavation ceased. Exposed portions of the addition's summit are featureless save for a stone pavement (U.27) arranged in the form of a "T", its stem running east-west. Unit 27's cross-bar extends along the eastern structure margin, covering 2.8m north-south by 1.25-1.7m across east-west. The "stem" is 1.8m wide north-south and was followed for 0.85m to the west, investigations ending before it did. Those parts of the summit not covered by U.27 are exposed dirt. Like its much larger northern neighbor, the southern addition is built into an east-to-west natural rise; most likely this low construction only had significant elevation on its downslope, eastern face.

Two low stone foundations, U.24 and 28, intervene between the core platform and its southern projection. Unit 28, though poorly preserved, seems to have been 0.3m wide, is 0.2-0.15m north of U.27, and runs 1.8m west from U.26. Unit 24 lies 0.3m north of U.28 and 0.25m south of U.4, occupying the niche created by the latter's southern jog. This 0.34m-high by 0.55-0.6m-wide foundation is 2.7m long east-west, its western margin lining up tolerably well with the core platform's southwest corner. Unit 28's jumbled appearance precludes specifying whether this footing stops opposite U.24's eastern margin or continues west of that point. It may be that the two constructions are offset from, and do not overlap, each other. In either case, U.24 and 28 appear to have supported free-standing perishable walls that separated TS. 2 and 3 architecture, segregating the activities pursued in these locales from each other.

Structure 444-1-1st's southern addition stood 0.25m tall on the east, its height decreasing from east to west as the ground surface on which it was erected rose in this direction. The addition measures 3.75m by at least 2.6m, and maintains the alignment of its northern predecessor (ca. 349 degrees). The featureless summit is partially paved, two stone foundations located just north of this surface separating the addition from the core platform to the north. All TS.3 architecture is built from a mixture of quartz stones and schist slabs; U.24, however, seems to be made exclusively of quartz. The naturally flatter aspects of the quartz rocks are usually directed outwards as are the possibly modified vertical faces of the schist. Rock sizes of facings and foundations tend to measure upwards of 0.2m along their longest dimension; the U.27 stones are usually smaller. A brown mud mortar was used as a binding agent in all units. Feature 1, a layer of burnt earth extending 0.45m west from the base of U.3 (Str. 444-1-1st's western basal facing), may be remnants of superstructure construction fallen soon after abandonment or the result of a localized fire built against the core platform's western margin.

Time Span 4

Following abandonment, all but the uppermost stones of extant construction were buried by the resumed, natural deposition of S.1. Extending for at least 2.19m west and 0.92m east of Str. 444-1-1st is a moderately dense concentrations of rocks fallen from final-phase architecture (F.2). Feature 2 stones were also found overlying the platform and the southern addition.

Structure 444-2

Structure 444-2 occupies the northwest corner of the patio, 2.2m northeast of Str. 444-1 and 1.55m west of Str. 444-3. The land here slopes up gradually from south to north to a point beneath Str. 444-1 before beginning its gradual northward descent towards the quebrada. There is some indication (see TS.2) that the terrain on which this edifice was raised ascended 0.37m across 5.78m south-to-north. Excavations conducted here within Subops. 444B, H, I, K, L, and M cleared roughly 62.1m², exposing the entirety of Str. 444-2-1st and a surface-level room built against the latter's southwest flank. Digging was pursued to maximum depths of 0.76m and 1.1m beneath modern ground level outside construction and into and through architectural fill, respectively. A single, clear building phase was revealed in the course of this work which was directed by B. Guizzetti.

Time Spans

| Time Span | Construction Phase | Units | Strata | Features | Date |
|-----------|--------------------|---------|--------|----------|------|
| 1 | - | - | S.1-3 | - | |
| 2 | Str. 444-2-1st | U.1-17 | - | - | |
| 3 | Str. 444-2-1st | U.18-22 | - | - | |
| 4 | - | - | S.3,4 | F.1 | - |

Time Span 1

Revealed at the base of a 1x1m probe dug into Str. 444-2-1st's summit is S.1, a fine-textured, hard-compacted, light brown clay. Stratum 1 was exposed to a maximum thickness of 0.26m (its base was not encountered) and rises 0.05m over 1m north-to-south. Blanketing S.1 by 0.34-0.36m is a moderately coarse-textured, soft-compacted, tan sand containing numerous small (0.01m diameter or less) rounded pebbles along with a few larger rocks (S.2). Stratum 2 ascends 0.01m over 1m north-to-south. At least 0.36m of S.3, a very fine-textured, hard-packed, brown soil (10YR 5/3), was found underlying TS.2 construction off Str. 444-2-1st's flanks (excavation ended before S.3's base was found). Stratum 3 occupies the same stratigraphic position as S.2 beneath Str. 444-2-1st's summit and we are not sure how these two layers are related. It may be that S.2 is a sizable lens embedded within S.3 or was artificially introduced in preparation for Str. 444-2-1st's construction. Why a portion of S.3 beneath Str. 444-2-1st would have been replaced with S.2 sand is unclear, though we are not in a position to decide between these alternatives. Recovery of artifacts from S. 2 and lower S.3 indicates a human presence in the area prior to TS.2. No cultural material was retrieved from S.1, a finding that very tentatively implies that this soil was deposited when there was no nearby human settlement.

Time Span 2

Structure 444-2-1st is a stone-faced platform that is divisible into two sections; a relatively narrow southeastern portion, 2.28m-wide northwest-southeast, and a wider northwestern component (measuring 3.5m across in the same direction). The northwestern summit also is approximately 0.26m higher than its southeastern analogue, a discrepancy that may owe a lot to the general south-to-north slope of the land beneath Str. 444-2-1st (The northwestern basal facing [U.3] is set 0.37m higher than its southeastern counterpart [U.1]). There is good reason to believe that the two segments were built separately, based on patterns of wall abutment. Most likely, the southeastern element enjoys temporal priority over its northwestern neighbor, though how much time elapsed between these building efforts is not certain.

The facings bordering Str. 444-2-1st's southeastern portion (U.1, 2, 6, and 7) stand 0.3-0.41m high and rise to the earthen-floored summit in a single ascent. Rooms 1-3 are arranged atop that summit in a southwest-northeast line, each one completely open on the southeast towards the patio. Room 2, the central chamber, is delimited by 0.22m-high by 0.45-0.5m-wide footings on the northeast (U.8) and southwest (U.9) along with the 0.41m-high by 0.44m-wide northwestern wall (U.7) that separates the southeastern and northwestern summits. The enclosure measures 1.15x2.27m. A 0.41m-high stone-faced bench (U.10) occupies Room 2's northwestern wall. Built against U.7 and over U.8, this entity measures 0.73m across and 1.5m long, northeast-southwest. A 1.7m-wide gap between U.7 and 9 in Room 2's western corner may have originally provided access to Room 1 on the southwest. Construction of U.10 narrowed this breach to 0.15m, allowing for the passage of air, not people, through this former door. Room 1 covers 2x2.05m, is featureless, and apparently open to the southwest as well as the southeast. Room 3, adjoining Room 2 on the northeast, encompasses 1.05-1.35x2.3m, is bounded by U.7, 8, and 11 (a 0.3m-wide footing) on the northwest, southwest, and northeast, respectively. Unit 11 ends 0.75m shy of the compartment's eastern corner, allowing movement from Str. 444-2-1st's northeast flank into Room 3. A 0.45m-wide by 0.85m-long stone-faced shelf (U.12) is built into the enclosure's northern interior corner.

Structure 444-2-1st's northwestern summit is built against U.7, its remaining flanks defined by basal walls preserved to 0.2-0.4m high (U.3-5). The fill (U.17) retained by U.3-5 and 7 is a very fine-textured, hard-compacted, brown earth (10YR 5/3) containing a few rocks. Unit 17 is identical to S.3 (see TS.1 for a description of S.3). Rooms 4 and 5 occupy the earthen-floored northwestern summit. The former covers 2.14x3.5m and is open on the northwest and northeast. Units 13 and 14, footings that are 0.27-0.28m high by 0.31-0.4m wide, partially enclose Room 4 on the southeast and southwest. Gaps measuring 1.35m across separate U. 13 and 14 from the northeast and northwest basal facings (U.3 and 4). These ample breaches would have facilitated movement between Room 4 and Room 5. Room 4's western door issues onto a stone surface covering 1.2x1.5m (U.15; measured across the center). Unit 15 fills the summit's western corner and borders Room 5 on the northwest. A 0.46m-wide by 2.45m-long corridor extends between U.7 and 13 and links Room 5 to Room 4. Room 5 measures 1.3x1.5m (calculated across the center) and, like its northeastern neighbor, contains no built-in furniture. Open on the southwest, a 0.45m-wide gap in the chamber's southern corner allows direct access to Room 6 on ground surface (see below). A stone pavement (U.16) encompassing 0.85x1.3m is set on ground level against U.3, 0.35m southeast of that facing's northern corner with U.4.

Structure 444-2-1st is a stone-faced, earth-filled platform standing ca. 0.4m high, encompassing 5.78x5.95m, and oriented roughly 346 degrees (Unit 5, part of the northwestern facing, diverges from this alignment, running at 351 degrees). The southeastern and northwestern building segments were probably raised sequentially (the former being earlier than the latter), have different dimensions (2.28x5.5m and 3.5x5.25m, respectively) and elevations (the northwestern summit is 0.26m higher than its southeastern counterpart), and are slightly offset from each other (the southeastern element runs 0.65m northeast past its northwestern counterpart). Altogether, five rooms comprise Str. 444-2-1st's superstructure, each delimited by stone foundations standing 0.22-0.41m high and measuring 0.3-0.5m across. Three earthen-floored rooms arranged in a southwest-northeast line fill the southeastern summit. The central compartment (Room 2) covers 2.6m² whereas its southwestern and northeastern neighbors encompass 4.1m² and 2.6m², Rooms 1 and 3 respectively. A 0.41m-high bench covering 0.73x1.5m fills most of Room 2's northwest wall while a shelf measuring 0.45x0.85m occupies Room 3's northern corner. Rooms 1-3 are all open to the southeast towards the patio but, by the end of TS.2, there are no clear doorways linking the chambers. The relatively late addition of Room 2's bench (U.10) effectively sealed the only known passage between this compartment and Room 1.

Rooms 4 and 5 on the northwest summit are, like Rooms 1-3, easily accessible from outside the platform. No doorways linking chambers on the southeast with those on the northwest were noted, however. Room 4, the largest of the compartments, covers 7.5m² whereas Room 5 on the southwest encompasses 2m². Movement between these enclosures was facilitated by 1.35m-wide doors in Room 4's western and eastern corners. The second passage leads to a 0.46m-wide by 2.45m-long corridor that issues into Room 5's eastern corner while the first opens onto a stone pavement that borders Room 5 on the north. Both Rooms 4 and 5 have earthen floors and lack surviving built-in furniture. A stone pavement covering 0.85x1.3m is set on ground surface off the platform's northeast flank at a point 0.35m southeast of its northern corner. This entity may have been introduced to facilitate passage between Str. 444-2-1st and its eastern neighbor, Str. 444-3-1st.

All TS.2 architecture consists of unmodified quartz and, to a lesser extent, schist slabs. Schist is a prominent component of U.2 and 5; otherwise quartz is used to fashion basal walls, footings, and floors. Some effort was apparently devoted to orienting the naturally flatter aspects of rocks outward. A brown mud mortar was used as a binding agent in all units.

Time Span 3

During this interval, a surface-level chamber (Room 6) defined by foundations 0.1-0.3m high and 0.3-0.65m wide (U.18-20) was raised off Str. 444-2-1st's southwest side. Room 6's northwestern margin is marked by a ca. 0.15m-high terrace (U.22) built into the south-to-north natural slope, and not by a load-bearing footing. Extending 1.5m southeast into Room 6 from U.22's approximate center is a block of stones set on end (U.21). Unit 21 measures 0.95m across, stands 0.45m high, and has lines of schist slabs running northwest-southeast down its approximate center. A 0.4m-wide gap in the eastern corner might have been a door or, more likely, a means of ventilating the enclosure's interior. Though the northwestern flank was apparently not sealed by a wall raised above the U.22 terrace, U.21 effectively limited movement across this side; 0.3m- and 0.45m-wide gaps northwest and northeast of U.21 are the only

breaches on the northwest. Room 6's earthen floor covers 1.95x3.1m (measured across the center); its northeastern and northwestern flanks preserve Str. 444-2-1st's orientation of 346 degrees while the remaining sides diverge from this alignment to varying degrees (oriented 353 degrees and 85 degrees on the southwest and southeast, respectively).

Time Span 3 architecture consists primarily of flat-laid schist slabs, mixed (in U.19) with quartz. A cut block was found at the northeast end of U.19; this is the only unambiguously shaped rock noted on Str. 444-2-1st. The naturally flatter aspects of all facing stones are generally directed outwards, though the relatively poor preservation of U.18 and 19 render such a judgement tentative. As noted above, U.21 diverges from this pattern in that its component rocks are set vertically. A line of upright schist slabs bifurcates U.21, running northwest-southeast. The southeastern-most stones in U.20 (the southeast extension of U.6 on Room 6's northeast side) are also set vertically. A brown mud mortar is used in all TS.3 units.

Time Span 4

After Str. 444-2-1st's abandonment, all but the highest extant portions of construction were buried by the continued natural deposition of S.3 and S.4. The latter is identical to underlying S.3 save for its darker color (a dark brown, 10YR 3/3); the two layers are probably parts of the same layer distinguished by a greater concentration of organic matter staining the top-most 0.31-0.35m. Embedded with upper S.3 and S.4 is a moderately dense concentration of rocks tumbled from TS.2 and 3 construction (F.1). Feature 1 extends at least 2.3m and 1m southeast and northwest of Str. 444-2-1st, respectively.

Structure 444-3

Structure 444-3 lies on the northern patio margin sandwiched between Strs. 444-2 and 444-8, which are 1.55m to the west and 1.65m to the east, in turn. The land rises gradually from south-to-north beneath Str. 444-3 before dropping off northward in the direction of the quebrada. Clearing ca. 56m² in Subop.444N, Q, R, and S exposed all of Str. 444-3-1st. Digging was pursued to maximum depths of 0.61m and 1.15m below modern ground surface outside architecture and into and through construction fill, respectively. A single building phase was identified in the course of this work which was overseen by B. Guizzetti.

Time Spans

| Time Span | Construction Phase | Units | Strata | Features | Date |
|-----------|--------------------|--------|--------|----------|------|
| 1 | - | - | S.1,2 | - | |
| 2 | Str. 444-3-1st | U.1-17 | - | - | |
| 3 | - | - | S.2,3 | F.1 | - |

Time Span 1

Stratum 1, a moderately fine-textured, soft-compacted, tan soil, was exposed to a maximum thickness of 0.41m in a 1x1m probe dug beneath Str. 444-3-1st's summit (the layer's base was not encountered). Stratum 1 ascends 0.04m over 1m north-to-south and did not contain cultural material. Stratum 2 overlies S.1, approximately 0.11m of this level intervening between the earlier soil and the base of TS.2 architecture. A moderately fine-textured, hard-compacted, dark brown (10YR 3/2) earth containing large quantities of small (0.01-0.02m in diameter) stones, S.2 yielded artifacts throughout its exposed thickness. This patterning suggests a human presence in the immediate area towards the end of TS.1.

Time Span 2

Structure 444-3-1st is a platform bounded on all sides by facings (U.3-6) that are 0.65-0.8m wide and rise 0.41-0.54m in a single ascent to the summit. The fill (U.15) retained by U.3-6 is a moderately fine-textured, hard compacted, dark brown soil in which are included numerous small stones (0.01-0.02m in diameter) and a few scattered larger rocks. Unit 15 is indistinguishable from underlying U.2. A 1.5m-long (north-south) addition (U.7) projects 0.35m east from the platform's southeast corner. Unit 7 was appended to U.4, the tops of both entities reaching the same height. Why U.4 was augmented in this way is unclear. The building is fronted on the south, patio-facing side by an elevated porch (U.1) and a step (U.2) leading from U.1 to the platform's summit. Unit 1 is surfaced with stones, measures 0.28m high by 0.7-0.9m wide, and runs 4m east-west. Unit 2 steps up 0.26m above U.1's pavement and runs back 0.59m to the north where it abuts U.3, the southern basal wall. The stair is slightly west of Str. 444-3-1st's center-line and measures 2m east-west. Unit 1, therefore, extends beyond U.2 by 0.75m on the east and 1.25m on the west. The summit supports a single, earthen-floored room that encompasses 2.35x3.1m. A 0.13m-high by 0.34m-wide wall (U.13) projects 1.05m westward into the summit compartment from U.4. Unit 13 intersects U.4's western face 0.45m north of the latter's junction with U.3 to form the summit's southeast corner. Introduction of U.13 created, together with the relevant portions of U.3 and 4, a cubicle measuring 0.45x1.05m in the chamber's southeast corner. This diminutive compartment is completely open on the west. The summit enclosure's west wall (U.6) is unusually wide (1m across) for 1.85m extending north from the room's southwest corner. This enlargement may have allowed U.6 to double as a load-bearing wall and bench.

A 0.22m-high wall (U.8) lies 1.5m north of the platform and extends east-west for at least 5.75m (the eastern terminus was not revealed while the western margin was so poorly preserved as to defy clear identification). Unit 8 is 0.55m wide and is connected to U.5, Str. 444-3-1st's northern facing, by a 0.5m-wide, north-south running wall (U.9). A low, 0.3m-wide wall (U.10) runs 1.2m southwest from U.8's southwest corner. The architectural significance of U.8-10 is ambiguous, at best. They may have been raised to create (minimally) two earthen-floored surface-level rooms off the platform's northern flank. The western putative compartment encompasses 0.5x3.4m (measured across the center) and could have been entered through the 0.9m-wide gap between U.10 and the platform's northwest corner (in the room's southwest corner). The eastern chamber measures 0.5m by at least 1.85m. A stone pavement (U.14) forms a semi-circle off the platform's west side. Unit 14 junctions with U.6, the western platform

facing, 0.45m south of Str. 444-3-1st's northwest corner. The surface then curves around, reaching a maximum distance of 1.5m west of U.6 before returning to abut that wall 2.15m south of its northern point of intersection. The doorway leading into the aforementioned western surface-level room is 0.2m north of U.14. Lying 0.25m south of U.14 is a 0.33m-high wall (U.16) that projects 1.1m (on the north) to 0.7m (on the south) west from its abutment with U.6. Unit 17, a 0.33m-high, 0.37m-wide, by 1.9m-long wall, projects southeastward from U.16's western margin. Unit 17 parallels the northeastern flank of adjacent Str. 444-2-1st far more closely than it does the general north-south alignment of the rest of Str. 444-3-1st.

Structure 444-3-1st is a 0.41-0.54m-high platform that covers 4.6x5.1m (including U. 1 and 2, excluding U.7) and is oriented roughly due north-south. A 0.28m-high, 0.7-0.9m-wide, by 4m-long (east-west) stone-faced and -surfaced porch fronts Str. 444-3-1st on its southern, patio-facing side. A 0.28m-high, 0.59m-wide, by 2m-long step rises above the porch and provides access to the earthen floored summit. The latter consists of a relatively large room encompassing ca. 7.3m². A 1.85m-long (north-south) widening of the compartment's western foundation to 1m across may have been designed to create a bench. The only other construction recorded on the summit is a 0.5m² cubicle built into the enclosure's southeast corner. Two earthen-floored surface-level rooms were apparently raised against the platform's northern flank. These narrow (0.5m wide) chambers are arranged in an east-west line. The completely exposed western room encompasses 1.7m² and could have been entered through a 0.9m-wide doorway in its southwest corner. The eastern enclosure was only partially revealed, the excavated portion covering 0.9m². Roughly 0.2m south of the western compartment's door is an apsidal-shaped stone pavement that abuts Str. 444-3-1st's western facing. This construction runs 2.15m north-south, and extends out at the maximum point on its arc to 1.5m west of the platform. A 0.33m-high wall abuts that same western facing 0.25m south of the pavement and projects 0.7-1m to the west. The latter construction's western margin terminates in a 0.33m-high, 0.37m-wide, by 1.9m-long wall that runs northwest-southeast. This entity was seemingly built to parallel the northeastern face of Str. 444-2-1st, 0.65-0.8m to the southwest. As such, it may have formalized an entrance into the patio between these adjoining edifices.

Time Span 2 architecture is generally fashioned from a mix of flat-laid, unmodified quartz and schist slabs, the larger rocks set into horizontal courses. Units 2 and 7 are made exclusively of quartz whereas schist forms the curved margin of U.14. The stones used to make U.17 are set vertically. A brown mud mortar is used as a binding agent in all constructions.

Time Span 3

Natural deposition of S.2 resumed after Str. 444-3-1st was abandoned. This layer was succeeded by S.3, a soil distinguished from S.2 solely by its looser compaction and greater density of small roots. Strata 2 and 3 are most likely parts of the same layer differentially affected by processes going on near current ground surface. Together, S.2 and 3 bury all but the highest surviving remnants of architecture. A moderately dense concentration of rocks tumbled from final-phase architecture (F.1) is found embedded in upper S.2 and 3 covering Str. 444-3-1st and extending for at least 0.99m and 1.34m north and south of construction, respectively.

Structure 444-4

Structure 444-4 was mapped as a single, low platform lying on the patio's northeast corner ca. 3m east of Str. 444-8. The terrain in Str. 444-4's environs rises gradually from north to south, ascending 0.12m across 11m in that direction. Excavations conducted within Subop. 444C, D, G, and J cleared approximately 44m², completely uncovering two surface-level constructions (Strs. 444-4A and 444-4B) in place of the single edifice we had anticipated. Digging was carried down to a maximum depth of 0.6m beneath modern ground surface revealing a single building phase in each case. All field investigations were directed by F. Bender.

Time Spans

| Time Span | Construction Phase | Units | Strata | Features | Date |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|--------------|--------|----------|------|
| 1 | - | - | S.1 | - | |
| 2 | Str.444-4A-1st Str. 444-4B-1st | U.1 U.2-5 | - | - | |
| 3 | - | - | S.2 | F.1 | - |

Time Span 1

Stratum 1, a very fine-textured, hard-packed, yellowish-brown soil (10YR 5/4) was revealed for a maximum thickness of 0.29m at the base of excavation (the stratum's lower limits were not encountered). Though hard to distinguish from overlying S.2, S.1 appears to have risen 0.05m over the 5.52m it could be traced from north to south. Retrieval of artifacts from S.1 indicates human activities in the vicinity while this layer was being deposited.

Time Span 2

Structure 444-4A-1st is represented by what seems to be the stone foundation (U.1) for a free-standing perishable wall. Unit 1's principal element is a 3.8m long (aligned ca. 352 degrees) wall standing approximately 0.2m high, and measuring 0.25-0.5m across. At 2.1m north from its southern end, U.1's more-or-less straight course is replaced by a segment that bulges out 0.5m to the east at maximum. This curved section measures 1.2m north-south and defies easy interpretations. One possibility, that it marks the diversion of U.1 around a post, is not supported by the identification of a posthole; this explanation, therefore, remains viable, if not proven. Walls 0.35m and 0.4m wide project 0.75m and 0.4m east and west of U.1's northern and southern termini (respectively; all included in U.1). Like so much about U.1, the architectural significance of these elements still escapes us. A dense concentration of artifacts, primarily ceramic fragments, was encountered immediately north of U.1 at depths suggesting their contemporaneity with Str. 444-4A-1st. A similar deposit was found ca. 10m to the north of Str. 444-3 in one of the Subop. 444Y test pits (see below), possibly continuation of the materials found near U.1. At the very least, this patterning suggests that the area north of Str. 444-4A-1st

was a favored spot for jettisoning trash near the end of TS.2.

Located 1.7m south of U.1 is a surface-level room (Str. 444-4B-1st) bounded by foundations that are 0.5-0.75m wide and 0.11-0.23m tall (U.2-5). The enclosure might have been entered through a 0.5m-wide breach in the northern foundation (U.3) and, more likely, by means of a 1.15m gap in the southwest corner facing the patio. The earthen-floored space contained by U.2-5 covers 2.1m (4.4m²) on a side and lacks built-in furniture. Structure 444-4B-1st encompasses 3x3.55m and is oriented approximately 357 degrees. Structures 444-4B-1st and 444-4A-1st are at comparable levels, implying their contemporaneity.

Units 1-4 were built using a mix of flat-laid, unmodified quartz rocks and schist slabs; U.5, Str. 444-4B-1st's southern footing, was fashioned exclusively from quartz. The naturally flatter aspects of the rocks are generally oriented outwards and all stones are set in a brown mud mortar. Rock sizes range from 0.05m to over 0.3m along their longest dimensions; most fall between 0.1-0.3m in this measure.

Time Span 3

Following abandonment, all surviving architecture was blanketed by the natural deposition of S.2. This very fine-textured, hard-compacted, dark grayish-brown soil (10YR 4/2) covers S.1 by as much as 0.33m and contains a very light concentration of stones fallen from TS.2 architecture (F.1).

Structure 444-7

Structure 444-7 occupies the southwest corner of the patio, ca. 3.9m southeast of Str. 444-1-1st and 12.5m south, and across the patio from, Str. 444-2-1st. The ground in Str. 444-7-1st's environs is relatively flat, sloping up 0.09m over 7m north-to-south. Clearing of approximately 19.5m² in Subops. 444P, T, U, and V revealed enough of Str. 444-7-1st's facings to reconstruct the building's basal dimensions. Investigation of the summit was largely restricted to the 1m-wide trench dug north-south on Str. 444-7-1st's axis; time did permit some clearing of a summit room. Digging was pursued to a maximum depth of 0.5m beneath modern ground surface outside construction (architectural fill was not probed). A single building phase was revealed in the course of this work which was directed by F. Bender.

Time Spans

| Time Span | Construction Phase | Units | Strata | Features | Date |
|-----------|--------------------|--------|--------|----------|------|
| 1 | - | - | S.1 | F.1 | |
| 2 | Str. 444-7-1st | U.1-11 | - | - | |
| 3 | - | - | S.1,2 | F.2 | - |

Time Span 1

At least 0.31m of S.1, a moderately fine-textured, hard-compacted, gray (7.5YR 5/1) soil, was laid down prior to Str. 444-7-1st's construction (S.1's base was not encountered). Embedded within S.1, 0.38m south of, and 0.18m below, Str. 444-7-1st's southern basal wall (U.3), is a layer of burned earth (F.1). Feature 1 is at least 0.06m thick (the element was uncovered in the base of excavation) and ascends 0.09m over 0.8m south-to-north. Though the evidence is far from clear, F.1 seems to be the remnants of a bajareque wall, probably part of a structure that was destroyed in a conflagration before the more substantial Str. 444-7-1st was raised during TS.2.

Time Span 2

Structure 444-7-1st is a platform bounded on all sides by facings (U.1-4) that rise 0.18-0.3m in a single ascent to the summit. Unit 2, the western basal wall, runs an estimated 2.25m south from its intersection with U.1 at the platform's northwest corner before stepping in (east) ca. 0.7m. South of this jog, U.2 resumes its straight-line course to Str. 444-7-1st's southwest corner. Enough of U.4, the eastern facing, was unearthed to indicate that there was no comparable step-back at an equivalent point on this side. Because only 1.95m of U.4 was cleared, however, we cannot be certain that the wall maintains a straight course between the southeast and northeast platform corners. Set against the edifice's northern face (U.1), slightly west of the center-line is U.5, a 0.13m-high, stone-faced and -surfaced construction that measures 0.8m across east-west and projects 0.59m north from its abutment with U.1. Unit 5 reaches essentially the same height as the top of U.1 (being 0.13m as vs. 0.18m tall), making it unlikely that the former served as a step-up onto the latter. Probably, U.5 was intended as a porch, extending the stone-paved northern summit (U.11) slightly to the north. Why this was thought necessary is still sublimely obscure. Unit 11 runs 1.8m south from U.1, ending in a summit enclosure delimited by the interior faces of U.2, 3, and 4 on the west (U.7), south (U.8), and east (U.9), respectively. The northern margin is defined by U.6, a ca. 0.2m step-down from the U.11 pavement onto the room's earthen floor. Measuring 1.75x3.15m, the compartment is featureless save for a 0.3m-high by 1m-long, east-west, stone block (U.10) that protrudes 0.8m northward from its abutment with U.8 into the room. Unit 10 is slightly west of U.8's center and may have functioned as a shelf. The unusually broad western foundation (1.15m separates U.2 and 7 on this side) may have doubled as a wall support and bench/shelf as well.

Structure 444-7-1st is a 0.18m to 0.3m-high stone-faced platform that covers 4.75x5.05m (excluding U.5) and is aligned roughly 355 degrees. The western facing jogs in (east) 0.7m approximately half way between the platform's northwest and southwest corners. There is no evidence for comparable step-backs on the other basal walls, though comparable changes in direction may lie undetected along the unexcavated portions of U.1 and 4. The northern 1.8m of Str. 444-7-1st's summit was at least partially surfaced with stone. This floor gives way on the south to a room covering 5.5m², its earthen floor set ca. 0.2m below the northern pavement. This room may have been bordered by a bench/shelf on the west, the 1.15m-wide foundation on this side being sufficiently broad to have served this purpose while also supporting a perishable upper wall. A second, potential shelf stands 0.3m high, is 1m long-east-west, and projects 0.8m north from the southern foundation into the compartment. A 0.13m-high projection was appended to Str. 444-7-1st's northern facing relatively late in TS.2. The purpose of this addition, measuring 0.8m east-west by 0.59m north-south, is unclear; possibly, it was intended to expand

the northern stone surface northward over a very limited area.

All TS.2 architecture consists of unmodified quartz rocks and schist slabs, the naturally flatter aspects of the stones directed outwards. The exposed portions of U.2, 4, and 6 are made exclusively of quartz; otherwise schist and quartz are mixed to form facings and footings. Stone sizes range from 0.1 to over 0.3m, measured across their longest dimensions. A brown mud mortar was used as a binding agent in all units.

Time Span 3

Following abandonment, all but the uppermost surviving portions of Str. 444-7-1st were covered by the continued natural deposition of S.1 and overlying S.2. The latter is distinguished from S.1 solely by its slightly darker hue (7.5YR 4/1, dark gray) and greater concentration of small roots. A moderately dense concentration of rocks fallen from TS.2 construction (F.2) is embedded within S.2 and upper S.1. Feature 2 was found overlying Str. 444-7-1st and extending for 1.48m south, and at least 0.34m north, from that platform.

Structure 444-8

Structure 444-8 is situated 1.65m east and 3m west of Strs. 444-3 and 444-4 on the patio's northern margin. The ground here slopes up gradually from north to south, ascending 0.28m across 6m in that direction around Str. 444-8. Excavations conducted within Subop. 444X were limited to a 1m-wide trench dug north-south across the edifice's approximate center along with clearing enough of the building's northern and southern facings to reconstruct Str. 444-8-1st's basal dimensions; ca. 12.5m² was exposed overall. Digging was carried down to maximum depths of 0.38m and 0.61m beneath modern ground level outside construction and into architectural fill, respectively. A single building phase was identified in the course of this work overseen by B. Guizzetti.

Time Spans

| Time Span | Construction Phase | Units | Strata | Features | Date |
|-----------|--------------------|-------|--------|----------|------|
| 1 | Str. 444-8-1st | U.1-5 | - | - | |
| 2 | - | - | S.1,2 | F.1 | - |

Time Span 1

Structure 444-8-1st is a platform bounded on the north and south by facings (U.2 and 1) that ascend 0.32-0.42m directly to the earthen-floored summit. Only 0.4m of U.3, the western basal wall, were revealed. We cannot, therefore, safely reconstruct the form of this or the edifice's eastern flank. The fill (U.5) retained by U.1-3 is a moderately coarse-textured, hard-compacted, brown (5YR 5/4) earth containing a moderately dense concentration of rocks. Unit 5 is indistinguishable from S.1 (see below). An L-shaped bench (U.4) is the sole component of superstructure architecture uncovered in these investigations. Standing approximately 0.18m

above the reconstructed earthen summit floor, U.4 measures 0.7m across north-south and has a 0.9m long projection extending south of the unit's eastern margin. Unit 4's main east-west running segment is at least 1.6m long, the southern projection being, minimally, 0.4m wide.

Structure 444-8-1st is a stone-faced, earth-and-stone-filled platform that stands 0.42m to 0.32m high, measures 3.35x4.8m, and is oriented roughly 92 degrees, 30 minutes (computed along the fully exposed northern basal wall). A substantial stone-faced, L-shaped bench rises 0.18m above the earthen-floored summit and faces south towards the patio. The bench's principal leg is at least 1.6m long east-west by 0.7m wide whereas its southern stem projects 0.9m south from the main element's eastern margin. The projection was uncovered over 0.4m of its total width. Time Span 2 architecture was fashioned from a mix of unmodified quartz rocks and schist slabs with the former predominating. Units 1 and the southern extension of U.4 consist entirely of quartz stones while schist was incorporated in U.2 and the main body of U.4. An effort was made to direct the naturally flatter aspects of the rocks outward and all stones are bound together with a brown mud mortar.

Time Span 2

After abandonment, Structure 444-8-1st was buried by the natural deposition of S.1 and 2. The former is a moderately coarse-textured, hard-compacted, brown (5YR 5/4) soil that accumulated to depths of as much as 0.2m during TS.2 (Stratum 1's base was not encountered, laying down of this soil possibly beginning prior to Str. 444-8-1st's construction). Stratum 1, in turn, is blanketed by 0.2-0.25m of S.2, a fine-textured, soft-compacted, gray-brown (7.5YR 4/1), root-rich earth. A moderately dense concentration of stones fallen from TS.1 architecture (F.1) is embedded in S.1 and 2, extending at least 0.58m south and 0.62m north of Str. 444-8-1st, respectively.

Test Pits

Three test-pits, each measuring 1m on a side, were dug 2m apart in a line running southwest-northeast across the approximate center of the Site 444 patio (all included in Subop. 444W). An additional nine tests of the same size were excavated in a line heading due north of Str. 444-3 (glossed as Subop. 444Y). These pits began at a point 10m north of Str. 444-3. Excavations in Subop. 444W and Y were intended to test for activity areas unassociated with surface-visible architecture.

The southernmost probe in Subop. 444Y uncovered a dense concentration of ceramic artifacts (763 items/excavated m³) within the uppermost 0.3m of the test pit. The next pit in the sequence to the north also yielded sizable quantities of artifacts (ca. 1000 pieces/m³) in its top-most layer. Subsequent probes dug in this sequence yielded almost no artifacts or other signs of occupation (1 fragment of chert was found in a test located 55m north of Str. 444-3). Only a light scattering of artifacts (53 items distributed across the three test pits) were retrieved from digging the probes that comprise Subop. 444W.

In general, therefore, it would seem that the Site 444 patio was kept very clean, was not a significant focus of activities involving the use of imperishable artifacts, or both. Similarly, beyond about 20m north of the visible constructions, evidence of human behaviors dropped off

markedly.

Chronological Summary

The earliest evidence of occupation at Site PVN444 dates to the Early Classic. Ceramics diagnostic of this interval were recorded in the vicinities of all of the investigated buildings save Str. 444-8 as well as in the test pits dug within and outside the patio (Subops. 444W and Y). These materials are mixed with pottery fragments dating to later spans and no architecture clearly pertaining to the Early Classic was identified. The extensive distribution across the settlement of Early Classic ceramics does, however, suggest that much of the site was occupied at this time.

Occupation during the Late Classic was better represented and it seems likely that Str. 444-3, 444-7, and 444-8 were raised near the end of this span. Structures 444-1, 444-2, and 444-4 may well have been built shortly thereafter at the beginning of the Terminal Classic. There is ample evidence that all of the excavated structures were in use during the Terminal Classic and some, especially Str. 444-1 and 444-4, probably continued in use into the Early Postclassic. A few ceramics diagnostic of this last span were recorded in the Subop 444Y probes dug north of the patio. If any architecture dates to this last interval it was apparently not substantial. There are no signs of occupation dating to the Late Postclassic at Site PVN444.