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PVN Op 428 Excavation Report

Edward M. Schortman
Kenyon College

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Site 428

Site 428 contain 9 surface-visible structures and is situated 0.4km northwest of Site 426. The buildings are grouped around three patios of varying sizes: the largest, on the west, measures 400m², the smallest covers 50m² and lies on the site's northeast margin, while the last plaza encompasses 100m² and is immediately east of the largest example, south of its more diminutive counterpart. Site 428 sits at the base of the Sierra de Omoa which rise, at first gradually and then more precipitously, to the north and east. A tributary of the Quebrada Guasma issues from these hills and cuts across the settlement's southern boundary. Examination of the stream's banks revealed that at least some deposits associated with Site 428 have been washed away by this water course; Str. 428-10, on the patio's south side, apparently lost its south flank in this way. Material eroding from those stream walls was collected in Subop. 428G. Four buildings were excavated at Site 428 from February 19-March 13, 1992 by L. Aldrete and J. Douglass. Fully 65m² was cleared in the course of this work. Archaeological investigations at the settlement complemented geomorphological study of the southern quebrada and the bordering hills. The latter efforts were designed to reconstruct hydraulic and erosion patterns dating to the 7th through 10th centuries AD in the valley.

Structure 428-3

Structure 428-3 is located on all three of the settlement's plazas; it sits on the northeast flank of the large main patio, on the southwest side of the small north plaza, and the northwest edge of the southern patio. The building is 2m west of Str. 428-5 and 5m southwest, and across the northern plaza, from Str. 428-7. Digging here within Subop. 428H was limited to a 1x10.4m trench running northwest-southeast across Str. 428-3's approximate center (10.4m² cleared). One construction phase was identified in the course of this work which was overseen by L. Aldrete.

Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	Str. 428-3-1 st	U.1-8	-	F.1	LCLIII, II

Time Span 1

Structure 428-3-1st is a platform mounted on the southeast by two stone-faced, earthen-floored terraces that together ascend 1.48m (U.1 and 2). The basal riser (U.1) measures 1.8m across while the next ascending riser (U.2) encompasses 1.45m southeast-northwest. Unit 1 is abutted by a low stone construction (U.7) that extends 1.5m to the southeast and runs for at least 0.6m to the northeast at which point it exited Subop. 428H. Unit 7 was possibly part of an outset staircase though its constituent risers, if they existed, were not well preserved. Structure 428-3-1st was bounded on the northwest by one stone wall (U.3) that rose 1.5m directly to the building's summit.

Two low stone steps (U.4 and 5) rise 0.17m and 0.15m above the U.2 tread on the southeast and give way to the 2m-wide earthen-floored summit. Unit 4, the basal riser, is 0.2m wide and is fronted for 0.6m northeast-southwest by a patch of burnt earth (F.1). Feature 1 extends 0.2m southeast of U.4 and stops 0.4m shy of the trench's southwest wall. A 0.35m-high by, minimally, 0.6m-wide stone-faced bench (U.6) runs 1.5m northwest from the southeast summit margin (its northeast edge was not definitively located in our excavations). The only other summit construction identified in the course of our work was a semicircle of stones (U.8) measuring 0.55m in diameter located on the back (southeast) edge of the U.3 basal terrace. Unit 8 most likely served as a support for a post that might have supported the superstructure's roof on its northwest margin.

In general, Str. 428-3-1st was a stone-faced, earthen-floored platform that stood 1.8m and 1.5m high on the southeast and northwest, respectively, encompassed 5.5m northwest-southeast (excluding the U.7 projection), and was aligned approximately 50 degrees. It was bordered on the southeast by two substantial terraces that together ascended 1.48m and were 1.8 and 1.45m wide. The basal riser was abutted by a low stone projection that extended 1.5m southeast into the southern plaza and may have been the southwest side of an outset staircase. A single stone facing delimited the building on the northwest. Two low (0.17m and 0.15m high by 0.2m wide) stone steps provided access to the 2m-wide summit from the upper southeastern terrace. An area covering 0.12m² of burnt earth was found immediately fronting the basal riser of this staircase. The superstructure contained at least one 0.35m-high stone-faced bench that ran 1.5m northwest from the summit's southeast edge. Lying 0.35m northwest of this bench is a semicircle of stones measuring 0.55m in diameter. This construction sits on the back (southeast) side of Str. 428-3-1st's northwest basal facing and probably functioned as support for a post that supported the eaves of the superstructure's roof. All stones used in construction during TS.2 consisted of angular rocks the naturally flatter faces of which were directed outwards. These stones were held in place by a mud mortar.

Structure 428-5

Structure 428-5 occupies the northeast margin of the intermediate-size plaza, defining, in turn, the southeast side of the smaller northern plaza. It is 2m east of Str. 428-3 and 5m southwest of Str. 423-7. The land here rises 0.12m over 11m southwest to northeast. Excavations conducted with Subop. 428F, directed by J. Douglass, uncovered ca. 22m², digging proceeding to maximum depths of 0.68m and 0.88m below modern ground surface within and beyond construction, respectively. One principal construction phase was recognized in the course of this work.

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	-	LCLIII,II?

2	Str. 428-5-1 st	U.1-12	-	-	LCLIII, II
3	-	-	S.3, 4	F.1	

Time Span 1

The first episode attested to in the vicinity of Str. 428-5 was the seemingly natural deposition of a brown, sandy, moderately hard- compacted soil with small rock inclusions (S.1). Stratum 1 was exposed in two discontinuous segments southwest and northeast of TS.2 architecture over which it rose 0.34m across 11m of horizontal distance. This layer was uncovered to a maximum thickness of 0.31m before it disappeared beyond our excavation limits. On the southwest S.1 is blanketed by 0.08-0.17m of a tan, moderately hard-compacted soil (S.2) that is less sandy than S.1 but does contain small rocks like its predecessor. Stratum 2 was not encountered overlying S.1 northeast of Str. 428-5-1st and is not recorded elsewhere in our investigations of this building.

Time Span 2

Structure 428-5-1st is fronted on the southwest by a stone-faced terrace (U.2) that is estimated to have stood 0.42m high. Unit 2 runs the entire length of Str. 428-5-1st's southwest flank, extending 6.8m northwest-southeast. This terrace intersects U.12 at Str. 428-5-1st's west corner. Unit 12 was traced for 1m to the northeast and seems to have served as the basal riser on this side of the building.

Unit 2 is fronted on the southwest by a 0.28m-high stone-faced riser (U.1) that measures 0.62-0.8m across and extends at least 4.3m northwest of its juncture with U.2 at Str. 428-5-1st's south corner. Unit 1 was not encountered near the building's west corner, suggesting that it turned back (northeast) and intersected U.2 shy of this point. Unit 1 may, therefore, be a step or terrace that formalized access to Str. 428-5-1st's summit from the southern plaza. A circular construction of stones (U.11) rests on U.1's earthen tread, ca. 0.1m back from (northeast of) its southwest face. Unit 11 measures 0.55m in diameter and may have served as a support for a wooden post that held up the eaves of a roof which extended out from the summit and sheltered Str. 428-5-1st's southwest side.

Lying 0.3-0.45m northeast of U.2 is a 0.08m-high stone wall (U.3). Unit 3 runs for 3.2m northwest from its putative intersection with Str. 428-5-1st's southeast basal facing, the location of which is unclear due to the poor preservation of this flank. Whereas U.3's southeastern terminus is at best vaguely define, it does end on the northwest where it intersects a line of schist slabs (U.4) set flush with the top of U.2's earthen surface. Unit 4 measures 0.4m across, runs 0.4m northwest-southeast, and possibly marks the entrance to Str. 428-5-1st's summit. The northwest side of this possible entryway may be delimited by a 0.08m-high stone wall (U.5) that extends at least 0.7m northeast from its intersection with U.4. Preservation of U.3 and 5 is less than ideal but it might be that they bound a doorway measuring 0.4m wide, surfaced with the U.4 stone slabs.

Only a 1m-wide swath of Str. 428-5-1st's summit was exposed within Subop. 428F. From what we can discern of the superstructure from this limited area it appears to have

consisted of at least two earthen-floored rooms set in a southwest-northeast line. The southwestern compartment (Room 1) covers 2.85m northeast-southwest, reaching from the U.4 schist slabs to a 0.48m-high by 0.57m-wide, northwest-southeast-running medial stone wall (U.7). What seems to be a stone-faced, earth-surfaced bench (U.6) rises 0.34m above Room 1's earthen floor and extends 1.2m northeast where it terminates in U.7. Northeast of U.7 the summit has been severely disrupted and all evidence of construction along the building's northeast flank is vaguely represented at best. What we can discern amongst the tumbled debris are traces of two stone faced terraces ascending Str. 428-5-1st's northeast flank. The basal riser (U.9) is ca. 0.47m high by 1.34m wide while its successor, U.8, rises an estimated 0.3m above U.9's earthen tread. Unit 8 marks the northeast side of Room 2, the superstructure's northeastern room. The latter's earthen floor is bounded by U.7 on the southwest and encompasses 2.2m northeast-southwest.

Terrace and bench facings are fashioned primarily of angular stones mixed with a few river cobbles, cut blocks, and schist slabs. The slabs were found concentrated in U.1, the basal southwestern step, where they are in line with U.4, the putative threshold spanning the door leading into Str. 428-5-1st's superstructure. Cut blocks were located primarily at the basal southwest terrace's (U.2') west corner where it joins U.12. In all cases, the flatter aspects of the rocks used in construction were oriented outwards and the stones were set in a brown mud mortar. The platform's fill was exposed exclusively on its northeast side where it consists of a medium tan, sandy soil that contains a few, dispersed small rocks (U.10).

Overall, by the end of TS.2 Str. 428-5-1st was a stone-faced, earth-filled platform that rose 0.8m and 0.9m high on the northeast and southwest, respectively, measured 8.44m northeast-southwest by 6.8m northwest-southeast, and was oriented roughly 140 degrees. The building was ascended by two stone-faced, earthen-surfaced terraces on the northeast while on the southwest one major stone-faced riser led up to the summit. The latter was fronted by a 0.28m-high, 0.62-0.8m-wide stone step that extends at least 4.3m northwest from the platform's south corner. How far this construction may have continued to the northwest is uncertain though it seems to have ended before reaching Str. 428-5-1st's west corner. Two walls, each 0.08m high, frame a 0.4m-wide gap space on the summit's southwest edge. This opening is paved with schist slabs and may mark a doorway into the superstructure's southwest enclosure (Room 1). Room 1's earthen floor measures 2.85m northeast-southwest and contains a 0.34m-high stone-faced, earth-surfaced bench that is 1.2m wide northeast-southwest. This bench projects southwest from Room 1's northeast wall. Lying on the other (northeast) side of that wall are the disturbed remains of what was likely another earthen-floored compartment (Room 2). Room 2 encompasses ca. 2.2m across northeast-southwest. No built-in furniture was revealed in the 1m-wide swath excavated northeast-southwest across this compartment.

Time Span 3

Following Str. 428-5-1st's abandonment as much as 0.6m of a medium to dark brown, clayey soil (S.3) was deposited. Stratum 3, in turn, is covered by 0.02-0.25m of a brown-gray, loosely compacted, root rich soil (S.1). Embedded in S.1 and 2 is a light (on the southwest) to moderately dense (on the northeast) concentration of rocks that probably fell from final-phase

architecture (F.1). Feature 1 was traced for 0.84m southwest and northeast of TS.2 construction.

Structure 428-7

Structure 428-7 closes off the northeast flank of the small northern patio. It is situated at the base of the initial rise to the Sierra de Omoa to the northwest, ca. 5m northeast of Str. 423-5 and 3.5m east of Str. 423-8 which is on the northwest side of the north patio. Digging here within Subop. 428B C, and D uncovered ca. 25m², excavations being pursued to maximum depths of 0.99m and 0.54m beyond and within construction, respectively. One major building phase, that underwent at least one significant episode of renovation, was recognized in the course of this work which was directed by John Douglass.

Time Spans

<u>Time</u>	<u>Construction</u>				
<u>Span</u>	<u>Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.1	-	-
2	-	-	S.2, 3	-	?
3	Str. 428-7-1 st	U.2-5, 10	-	-	LCLIII, II
4	Str. 428-7-1 st	U.1-9	-	-	LCLIII, II
5	-	-	S.4-6	F.1	

Time Span 1

The first event for which we have evidence in Str. 428-7's environs is the apparently natural deposition of a yellow/tan, coarse-textured, sandy soil with small stone inclusions (S.1). Stratum 1 was exposed off Str. 428-7-1st's northwest flank where it was traced to a maximum thickness of 0.06m (S.1's base was not encountered). No cultural material was retrieved from this admittedly restricted investigation of S.1. This finding very tentatively suggests that there was no significant cultural activity in the immediate area while S.1 was being deposited.

Time Span 2

Stratum 2, a light brown, hard-compacted, sandy soil largely devoid of rocks, covers S.1 by 0.18-0.41m. As was the case with its predecessor, S.2 was only found off Str. 428-7-1st's northwest side where our probes were carried deep enough to find it. Though S.1 runs more-or-less evenly over the 1m it was exposed running northwest-southeast, S.2 has a much more undulating surface. The latter surface drops 0.26m across 0.6m northwest to southeast before rising 0.31m over 1.2m in the same direction. The result is that the upper uncovered surface of S.2 defines a round-bottom declivity that measures an observed 1.8m across and is, at most, 0.31m deep. There is no strong evidence that this depression was created by people; it may have resulted from natural processes such as run-off from the adjacent hills. Whatever its

cause, the dip in S.2 is filled in with a gray-brown, moderately hard-compacted, sandy soil (S.3). Stratum 3 ascends continuously 0.17m across 1.8m from northwest to southeast.

Time Span 3

Structure 428-7-1st seems, at this stage, to have been a surface-level building delimited by substantial stone foundations on the northwest (U.3), northeast (U.4, 5), and southeast (U.2; the southwest flank was not uncovered). Units 2 and 3 are fairly substantial stone constructions measuring 0.56m and 0.78m wide by 0.48m and 0.44m tall, respectively. On the northeast, U.4 is ca. 0.5m wide by 0.59m tall and extends 1.15m southeast from its integrated junction with U.3.s northern terminus. It is succeeded at this point by U.5, a much lower (0.19m tall) stone construction that steps back 0.2m southwest from the line of U.4 and continues southeast for 2m to join with U.2. Units 4 and 5 diverge in their orientations, U. 4 being aligned roughly 319 degrees while U.5 runs at ca. 310 degrees. It may be that U.4 and 5 were built at different times or served slightly different functions; the shorter U.5 might signal the presence of an expansive entryway into Str. 428-7-1st at this time. Alternatively, the differences in height between these walls may simple be a consequence of their variable degrees of preservation.

The room enclosed by U.2-5 covers 2.66m northwest-southeast by an inferred 1.9m northeast-southwest and is surfaced with a stone floor (U.10). Unit 10 consists of flat-laid small rocks set at the base of the surrounding walls and covered by 0.05m of fine-textured, yellow soil (all included in U.10) The U.10 stones are embedded in the same yellowish soil that blankets them.

In general, by the conclusion of TS.3, Str. 428-7-1st was a surface-level building measuring ca. 2.65x3.95m, defined by stone foundations that vary from 0.5-0.78m wide by 0.19-0.59m tall, and aligned approximately 229 degrees. The room these walls delimit covers ca. 5.1m² and was surfaced with a layer of stones immediately overlain by 0.05m of fine-textured, yellow soil. Structure 428-7-1st's foundations were made of stones set in a mud mortar and with their flatter aspects directed outwards. It is not clear if these rocks were purposefully shaped; if not, they were carefully chosen for the naturally flat faces.

Time Span 4

It appears that Str. 428-7-1st was in the process of being expanded to, at least, the northeast when construction ceased during this interval. One aspect of this renovation involved filling in the former surface-level room delimited by U.2-5 with a gray-brown sandy soil (U.8) that overlies the U.10 floor by as much as 0.2m. Unit 8, in turn, was blanketed by 0.21-0.34m of gray-brown earth (U.9) that has a higher clay content than its predecessor. Both U.8 and 9 contain a moderately dense concentration of small to medium-size stones. Together, the addition of U.8 and 9 converted what had been a surface-level edifice bounded by stone foundations into the core of an earthen-floored platform the summit of which covered 5.1m².

A stone-faced terrace (U.1) was added 0.61m southeast of U.2, the core platform's southeast facing, and runs for 4.85m southwest-northeast. Based on a change in construction it appears that U.1 reached this final length in two phases, having been expanded 1m to the

northeast at some point in its use-life. Unit 1 is 0.43m high, its stone facing fronting an earthen tread, and terminates on the southwest where it seems to run back to join U.2. This junction defines the south corner of Str. 428-7-1st during TS.4. The building's east corner, in turn, is formed by the junction of U.1 and U.6. The latter served as Str. 428-7-1st's northeast basal facing and stood 0.30m tall. Like U.1, U.6 was apparently the stone facing for an earthen-floored terrace though, at 2.6m across, it is considerably wider than its southeastern counterpart. Unit 2 still rose 0.32m above the U.1 terrace while U.4 projected an estimated 0.37m above the terrace fronted by U.6. Unit 6 did not corner with any preserved construction on the northwest to form the platform's north corner. Extensive clearing here implies that no terrace was ever built here and it may well be that this version of Str. 428-7-1st was never completed.

Overall, by the end of TS.4, Str.428-7-1st was a 0.8m-high, stone-and-earth-filled platform that covered 4.6x5.5m, and was oriented roughly 322 degrees. As noted above, the building was probably not completed before it was abandoned. Structure 428-7-1st's core platform supported an earthen-floored room that encompassed 5.1m² and was bounded on the southeast and northeast by stone-faced and earthen-floored terraces that stood 0.43 and 0.3m high and were 0.61 and 2.6m wide, respectively. Most likely another terrace was to have been added to the northwest face of the platform but was not finished. Given the way that U.1, the southeast terrace, junctions with the core platform's south corner, we infer that the builders intended to add no terraces to Str. 428-7-1st's southwest flank. The core platform extended 0.32-0.37m above its bordering terraces on the northeast and southeast. The stones used in constructing U.1 and 6 all have clear flat faces that are directed outwards. These rocks are set in a mud mortar.

Time Span 5

Following abandonment of Str. 428-7-1st, a gray-brown, sandy soil (S.4) accumulated to as much as 0.43m off the edifice's flanks. Stratum 4 was then blanketed by 0.12-0.32m of a gray-brown, clayey, root rich-soil (S.5). The last activity identified in our excavations was the introduction of a 0.02-0.06m-thick layer of a moderately coarse-textured, dark gray brown soil (S.6) that covers S.5 and all but the uppermost stones of final-phase architecture. Embedded within S.4-6 is a moderately dense concentration of rocks that had tumbled from TS.4 architecture (F.1). Feature 1 was traced for 0.84m beyond the extant limits of Str. 428-7-1st.

Structure 428-9

Structure 428-9 is a diminutive construction most of which has been cut and carried away by the quebrada which borders the settlement on the south. It is on the south side of the large, principal plaza, 17.5m south from Str. 428-3 and 20m southeast of Str. 423-1. Digging here within Subop. 428E was limited to a 1x4.7m trench excavated into the building from its north, plaza-facing side (4.7m² cleared). One construction period was identified in the course of this work which was directed by L. Aldrete.

Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	Str. 428-9-1st	U.1-3	-	-	?

Time Span 1

Structure 428-9-1st is a platform that is ascended on its north, plaza-facing side by three low stone-faced terraces (U.1-3). Unit 1, the basal riser, is 0.15m high and is backed by an earthen-floored tread that encompasses 0.8m. This construction is succeeded by U.2 the stone face of which is 0.13m high. Unit 2's earthen tread runs south for 0.55m where it terminates in U.3. This stone-faced terrace ascends 0.2m. Excavations did not proceed south of this point.

By the conclusion of TS.2, Str. 428-9-1st was a stone-faced, earthen-floored platform that stood at least 0.48m high and was aligned very roughly 92 degrees. The building was mounted by at least two terraces on the north, measuring, in ascending order, 0.15m high by 0.8m wide and 0.13m tall by 0.55m wide. One more terrace may stand 0.2m above the second riser or the last construction might have been the final step-up to the summit. Both angular rocks and cobbles were used in construction here, all stones being set in a mud mortar.

Architectural Summary

Four of the buildings uncovered at Site 428 are stone-faced platforms that stand 0.48m-1.8m high. Terraces measuring 0.13-0.8m high by 0.55-2.6m wide mount at least one side of these edifices. In two cases (Strs. 428-3-1st and 428-9-1st) these earthen-floored, stone-faced risers are located on the platform's plaza-facing side; on Strs. 428-7-1st and 428-5-1st they grace the flank(s) oriented away from the patio. Two sets of outset stone stairs were identified on the plaza-facing sides of the two largest buildings investigated at the settlement. Structure 428-3-1st has what seems to be a staircase that projects 1.5m southeast into the south patio. In addition, two low stone steps (0.15m and 0.17m high by 0.2m wide) provide access from Str. 428-3-1st's second terrace to its summit. A single riser standing 0.28m high extends 0.62-0.8m from Str. 428-5 into the same southern plaza. The latter staircase is at least 4.3m long, running northwest from the platform's south corner but stopping an undetermined distance shy of its west corner.

Building summits are surfaced with earth and encompass 2-5.64m across (three measureable examples). The one summit whose area can be reliably estimated covers 5.1m² (Str. 428-7-1st). Full clearing of Str. 428-7-1st's superstructure indicated that it consisted of one earthen-floored room and the same may be the case for Str. 428-3-1st though excavations here were more limited. Structure 428-5-1st, on the other hand, supported at least two rooms set in a southwest-northeast line. The southwestern example measures 2.85m across and was likely entered through a 0.4m-wide doorway bounded by 0.08m-high stone walls. That door is set in the room's southwest side overlooking the step down to the south patio. Its northeast counterpart encompasses 2.2m across. These two compartments are divided by a stone wall measuring 0.48m high by 0.57m wide. Stone-faced, earthen-surfaced benches were noted atop

Str. 428-3-1st (0.35m high, 1.5m long, by at least 0.6m wide) and in Str. 428-5-1st's southwest compartment (0.34m high by 1.2m wide).

In two cases, circles of stone measuring 0.55m in diameter were recorded on a stone Step (Str. 428-5-1st) and summit edge (Str. 428-3.1st). We surmise that these locally unusual constructions were supports for vertical wooden poles that supported the eaves of superstructure roofs.

The first recorded version of Str. 428-7-1st (TS. 3) was apparently a surface-level building measuring 2.65x3.95m and delimited by stone foundations that rose to 0.19-0.59m tall and were 0.5-0.78m wide. The room they contained covered 5.1m² and was surfaced with stone. Those rocks were set in, and covered to at least 0.05m, by a yellow soil. No doorway leading to the edifice's interior was identified though such an entryway may have been located in Str. 428-7-1st's southwest flank, the side which was not cleared in our excavations.

That Str. 428-7-1st's final version was not completed implies that the settlement was abandoned precipitously. The conversion of this building from a surface-level construction to a platform tentatively hints at the growing ability of Site 428's residents to command increasing quantities of labor, an ability that was apparently not sustainable.

Building orientations ranged from 15-60 degrees with four of the five examples concentrated between 49-60 degrees. In general, there seems to have been no concerted effort to arrange the investigated structures according to closely similar alignments. This observation corresponds to the surface-appearances of all Site 428 buildings. Though organized around three contiguous patios, the structures do not generally evince common orientations.

The stones used in construction at Site 428 are generally unshaped rocks that were carefully chosen for their flat faces which were directed outwards. A somewhat greater range of materials were employed in raising Str. 428-5-1st than was evident in the other investigated buildings. Here schist slabs not only marked the southwest threshold leading into the summit but were concentrated on that portion of the outset step leading to the aforementioned door. Cut blocks were also included in terrace facings here, seemingly concentrated at the platform's corners where, presumably, the greatest architectural stresses were concentrated. In all cases, stones used in terrace, bench, and step facings were set in a mud mortar.

Chronological Summary

All of the architecture uncovered at Site 428 dates to the end of Late Classic II and beginning of Late Classic III. The one instance where artifacts pre-dating final-phase architecture were encountered (Str. 428-3) also appears to fall within this temporal period. There were no signs of occupation pre- or post-dating the Late Classic II/III transition.