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PVN Op 337 Excavation Report

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Site 337

Site 337 lies on the northwest margin of the Naco valley, ca. 250m and 7.2km northwest of Site 335 and La Sierra, respectively. The terrain here slopes up gradually from southeast to northwest towards the bordering hills. The steep ascents of the latter are a scant 250m northwest of the settlement. Site 337 is situated at the confluence of two seasonal tributaries of the Quebrada Agria whereas the perennial Rio Manchaguala lies approximately 350m to the north. The three surface-visible structures comprising Site 337 enclose a patio open to the southeast. None of the buildings stands more than 1m high.

Structures 337-1 and 337-2 were the foci of excavations at the settlement, conducted under the direction of J. Ehret and L. True from February 24 through March 20, 1992. Fully 120m² was cleared in the course of revealing all of Str. 337-2 and roughly 89% of Str. 337-1. In addition to these structure-focused investigations, two trenches were dug in seemingly open areas south of Str. 337-2 and on the east side of the patio to locate cultural deposits and features not detected on ground surface.

Structure 337-1

Structure 337-1, situated 1.8m northeast of Str. 337-2, closes off the northeast side of the Site 337 patio. The ground here is fairly level, ascending 0.08m over 12.8m southwest-to-northeast. Excavations conducted here within Subops. 337B and C cleared approximately 71.2m², exposing ca. 89% of Str. 337-1-1st. Digging was carried down to maximum depths of 0.74m and 0.58m beneath modern ground level outside construction and within architectural fill, respectively. A single building phase was revealed in the course of this work directed by J. Ehret from February 27 through March 20, 1992.

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.1-3	-	LCLII/III
2	Str. 337-1-1st	U.1-15	-	-	LCLIII, EPC?
3	-	-	S.3-5	F.1	-

Time Span 1

Stratum 1, a hard-compacted, light yellowish brown clay with many included rocks, was exposed to a maximum thickness of 0.26m northeast of, and underlying, Str. 337-1-1st (S.1's base was not encountered). Stratum 1 rises a scant 0.05m over the 2.4m it was uncovered running northeast-to-southwest and it was not clearly revealed at comparable depths below ground level southwest of Str. 337-1-1st. Either S.1 runs deeper on the southwest than we expected, lying beyond excavation limits, or it is represented here by S.2. The latter is very

similar to S.1 in all ways save color; S.2 has a reddish-brown hue. Stratum 2 is at exactly the same level as S.1 on the northeast, appearing immediately beneath TS. 2 architecture (U.13) and dropping 0.26m across 0.8m southwest of U.13. If S.1 and 2 are parts of the same deposit, then Str. 337-1-1st faces southwest over a natural descent. Strata 1 and 2 were not clearly associated with cultural material, implying that there was no human settlement in the area at the time they were deposited. Earth levels designated S.1, as these are manifested in Strs. 337-2, 337-Sub1, and Subop. 337F, share very similar characteristics, including the negative feature of cultural sterility. It would appear, therefore, that Site 337's occupants pioneered settlement here not long after soil started forming on this rocky surface.

The lower 0.05m of S.3, a moderately soft-compacted, light brown, sandy silt largely devoid of stones, underlies Str. 337-1-1st construction on the northeast (U.7). Otherwise, S.3 covers TS.2 architecture, most of this soil not being introduced until TS.3. Such a thin sliver of S.3 is assignable to TS.1 that we cannot be sure whether artifacts found in it predate TS.2 or worked their way down from later deposits.

Time Span 2

Structure 337-1-1st is a platform bounded by stone-faced ascents (U.1-4) that rise 0.59m (on the southwest) and 0.71m (on the northeast) to the summit. The southwestern basal wall, U.1, jogs back (north) 0.3m, 2.9m northwest of the southern corner and continues northwest for at least 1.15m at which point it left our excavations (the platform's western corner was not revealed). A 0.27m-high, stone-faced step (U. 13) projects 0.9-1.2m southwest from U.1 into the patio. This single stair joins U.1, 0.85m northwest of that element's southern corner, and was traced for 3.35m to the northwest before excavation ceased. Unit 7 is a 0.42m-high terrace set against Str. 337-1-1st's northeastern flank (U.3). It extends 0.5m northeast from its junction with U.3, ends 1.95m southeast from the platform's northern corner, and continues for 4.36m southeast until it encounters U.8. The latter is a 0.15m-high element that protrudes 0.9m southeast from the southeastern basal wall (U.4) and measures 1.45m northeast-southwest (its overall width is 1.2m northwest-southeast). Unit 8 may be another step providing access to Str. 337-1-1st's summit, this time from the non-patio side. The fill contained by U.1-4 (U.14) is a moderately soft-compacted, light brown, sandy silt in which are embedded a few rocks (U.14 indistinguishable from S.3). Unit 14's top is the superstructure's primarily earthen floor.

The superstructure consists of three enclosures (Rooms 1-3) bounded by foundations (U.3 [doubling as basal facing and wall footing], 5, 6, 9-12) standing 0.3-0.65m high and measuring 0.45-0.7m across. Room 1 overlooks the U.13 step on the southwest, patio-facing side. This enclosure is completely open on the southwest and northwest, and is bounded by U.5, 10, and 11 on the remaining sides. Room 1 covers approximately 4.7m². A stone pavement (U.15) extends 1.1m into the compartment's northwestern margin and continues northwestward, filling the 0.7-0.95m between the basal northwest facing (U.2) and Room 2's northwestern foundation (U.12). A 1.1m-wide doorway set slightly southeast of center in Room 2's southwestern perimeter links this enclosure with Room 1. Room 2 encompasses 2.55x2.7m, its eastern corner breached by a 0.35m-wide gap between U.3 and 9. This break was apparently created by dismantling the upper portion of U.9; foundation stones of that construction continue at floor level northeastward to intersect U.3. Too narrow to permit the movement of most people, this discontinuity may have helped ventilate Room 2. Room 3 is accessed via a 0.6m-wide by 1.1m-long corridor that runs northeast from Room 1's eastern corner. A change in construction over

the northeastern-most 0.5m of the footing that borders the corridor on the southeast (U.5) may point to the former existence of a door set between U.5 and 6 that was filled in by TS.2's conclusion. (U.6 is Room 3's southeastern foundation). Room 3 measures 1.05x2.45m and, like its northwestern counterpart, has a gap in its eastern corner. This breach is 0.55m wide and issues directly onto U.8, the low step appended to the platform's eastern corner. None of the summit chambers contains built-in furniture.

Structure 337-1-1st is a 0.59-0.71m-high, stone-faced, earth-filled platform that measures 6.4x7.6m (including U.7 and 13), and is aligned roughly 26 degrees. The formal entryway to the summit is on the southwest where the 0.27m-high U.13 step projects 0.9-1.2m into the patio. Passing over this riser and the building's southwestern facing gives direct access into an open foyer (Room 1), encompassing 4.7m². The other two enclosures making up the superstructure lie northeast of this compartment, doorways measuring 1.1m and 0.6m wide providing access to Rooms 2 and 3, respectively. The former covers 6.9m² and is linked to Room 3 on the southeast by a 0.35m wide-gap in its eastern corner. This breach may have allowed for the passage of air, not people, between the compartments. The 0.6m-wide by 1.1m-long corridor leading from Room 1's eastern corner gives way to Room 3 which encompasses 2.6m². This enclosure could probably also be reached by stepping up and over the 0.15m-high stair set against Str. 337-1-1st's eastern corner. A 0.55m-wide door in Room 3's eastern corner faces onto this step. The only portion of the summit paved with stones lies between the northwest basal facing and Room 2's northwestern footing; this surface intrudes 1.1m into the northwestern portion of Room 1.

All facings, footings, and pavements are made primarily of unmodified stone chunks, the naturally flatter aspects of which are directed outwards. Schist slabs were used to make the U.13 riser, most of U.1 and 7, and topped U.4, at least along its northern 2.2m; a few cut blocks are incorporated in U.5. Rock sizes range from 0.04x0.05m to 0.22x0.44m, with most falling towards the middle of this continuum. Chinking stones fill in the gaps around their larger analogues and all of the rocks are set in a brown mud mortar.

Time Span 3

Following abandonment, Str. 337-1-1st was blanketed by the renewed deposition of S.3 along with S.4 and 5. The last two layers are fine-textured soils distinguished by underlying S.4's slightly darker brown color and S.5's greater concentration of small roots. Together, S.4 and 5 bury S.3 by 0.27-0.49m along with all but the highest preserved segments of TS.2 architecture. Embedded within upper S.3 and all of S.4 and 5 is a moderately dense concentration of stones fallen from Str. 337-1-1st (F.1). Feature 1 is found over the platform's summit and extending for 1.15m and 1.55m northeast and southwest of the building.

Structure 337-2

Structure 337-2, located 1.8m southwest of Str. 337-1, closes off the northwestern side of the patio. The ground here is relatively flat, ascending 0.36m across 6.5m southeast-to-northwest. Clearing ca. 30m² within Subop. 337D completely uncovered Str. 337-2, digging being carried down to maximum depths of 0.77m and 0.6m below modern ground surface outside construction and within architectural fill, respectively. A single building phase was identified in the course of these investigations directed by L. True from February 24-March 12,

1992.

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.1-3	-	LCLII/III
2	Str. 337-2-1st	U.1-7	-	-	LCLIII, EPC?
3	-	-	S.4, 5	F.1	-

Time Span 1

Natural deposition of S.1-3 constitutes the first set of activities identified in Subop. 337D. Stratum 1 is a fine-textured, micaceous, yellow clay containing considerable quantities of small rocks. This soil was exposed to a maximum thickness of 0.11m (its base lies beyond excavation limits) and ascends 0.26m over 7.9m southeast-to-northwest. Stratum 2, a fine-textured, micaceous, orange-red sandy clay, covers S.1 by 0.14-0.28m. Like its predecessor, S.2 also rises southeast-northwest, the level=s northwestern-most exposed point being 0.19m above its southeastern counterpart 7.92m distant. Stratum 3 buries S.2 by 0.17-0.22m northwest of Str. 337-2-1st. This fine-textured, micaceous, tan, sandy to gravelly soil was not found southeast of the building. Whatever processes introduced S.3 were apparently limited to the edifice=s upsloping side. Recovery of artifacts from S.2 and 3 points to a human presence in the immediate area while these soils were being deposited. Stratum 1 does not seem to contain cultural material, though more of it would have to be exposed to test this proposition.

Time Span 2

Structure 337-2-1st is a platform bounded by cobble facings (U.1-4), 0.3-0.6m wide, that rise 0.3-0.5m in a single ascent to the summit. The discrepancy in wall heights may indicate that Str. 337-2-1st had a bi-level earthen-floored summit. The southeastern facing (U.1) and the southeastern 2m and 2.1m of the northeastern and southwestern basal walls (U.2 and 4) stand 0.2-0.39m high whereas the northwestern facing (U.3) and the northwestern segments of U.2 and 4 are 0.45-0.5m high. Units 2 and 4 step out 0.2m north and south, respectively, from the main lines of their facings at the change in elevation. This patterning tentatively suggests that Str. 337-2-1st=s summit mirrors the southeast-to-northwest rise over which it was built, its southeastern half being roughly 0.2m lower than its northwestern counterpart. Unit 1 rests on S.2 while its northwestern counterpart, U.3, is sunk 0.23m into S.3. The fill (U.7) contained by U.1-4 is a fine-textured, micaceous light brown earth in which a few scattered stones are found.

Unit 5, a 0.08m-high (above S.2) stone-surfaced step, fronts Str. 337-2-1st=s southeastern flank. Located on U.1's centerline, U.5 projects 0.72m southeast from that basal wall into the patio and measures 1m across northeast-southwest. The only element of superstructure architecture recorded on Str. 337-2-1st is U.6, a 0.25m-high by 0.25m-wide wall that extends 1.6m northwest from U.1. Unit 6 rests on the U.7 fill and seems to have been designed to create

an enclosure covering 0.8x1.6m (measured across the center) in the summit=s southern corner. The remainder of the summit encompasses approximately 7.4m² and lacks other signs of construction. Passage from the southern cubicle into the rest of the summit was easily negotiated through a 0.65m-wide gap between U.4 and 6.

Structure 337-2-1st is a stone-faced, earth-filled platform standing 0.3m (on the southeast) and 0.5m (on the northwest) high, covering 4x4.25m (measured across the approximate center), and aligned roughly 16 degrees. A 0.1m-high, 1m-long, by 0.72m-wide stone-faced and -surfaced step located on the center of the building=s southeastern flank provided access to the earthen-floored summit. The latter is divided into two segments of unequal size; a small (1.3m²) cubicle in the southern corner and a much larger, but featureless, room (7.4m²) taking up the rest of summit. A 0.65m-wide gap in the southern enclosure=s northwest flank linked these two superstructure components.

All walls and foundations are faced with largely unmodified, angular stone chunks the naturally flatter aspects of which are directed outwards. The larger rocks are set in clear horizontal courses, chinking stones packed around their more sizable analogues to varying degrees (especially prevalent in U.3). All rocks are set in a brown mud mortar. Stone sizes range from 0.04x0.04m to 0.17x0.54m, with most falling towards the middle of that range.

Time Span 3

Following abandonment, Str. 337-2-1st was almost completely blanketed by the natural deposition of S.4 and 5. Both layers are fine-textured, micaceous, medium-brown soils distinguished, primarily, by the greater concentration of small roots in overlying S.5. Together, S.4 and 5 cover S.2 and 3 by 0.2-0.36m. Embedded within S.4 and 5 is a light scattering of stones fallen from final phase architecture (F.1). Feature 1 extends for 0.88m and 1.62m southeast and northwest of Str. 337-2-1st, respectively.

Structure 337-Sub1

Structure 337-Sub1 was revealed 2.6m south of Str. 337-2-1st on the west side of the Site 337 patio. No signs of construction, or any prehistoric activities for that matter, were apparent in this area on the surface. The 13m² excavated within Subop. 337E south of Str. 337-2 was designed to locate just this sort of evidence, thereby greatly contributing to our surprise when the efforts actually succeeded. Digging was carried down to a maximum depth of 0.58m below modern ground surface outside (downslope from) architecture. A single building phase was identified in the course of this work directed by L. True from March 2-6, 1992.

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.1, 2	-	LCLII/III?
2	Str. 337-Sub1-1st	U.1	-	-	LCLIII, EPC?
3	-	-	S.3	F.1	-

Time Span 1

Natural deposition of S.1 and 2 predate erection of Str. 337-Sub1-1st. Stratum 1 is a hard-compacted, reddish-brown, micaceous clay containing high densities of small rocks, including schist fragments. This soil was exposed to a maximum thickness of 0.31m (its base was not encountered) and rises 0.21m over 6.12m southeast-to-northwest. Stratum 1 was almost completely lacking in cultural materials, the few artifacts included in the layer most likely having percolated down from later deposits. As such, these items do not definitively indicate human settlement in the area when S.1 was being introduced. Stratum 2, a fine-textured, moderately hard-compacted, dark medium-brown soil with far fewer rocks than its predecessor, covers S.1 by 0.1-0.16m and ascends 0.07m across 1.2m southeast-to-northwest. This layer was only found southeast (downslope) from Str. 337-Sub1-1st, implying that the processes responsible for its deposition were localized in this area. Artifacts retrieved from S.2 point to human settlement in the vicinity while the level was being laid down.

Time Span 2

Structure 337-Sub1-1st is represented by a single, isolated stone wall (U.1) that stands 0.05m above S.2, is 0.3m wide, and runs 2m on an azimuth of ca. 13 degrees. Unit 1 is fashioned of unmodified, angular stone chunks set in a brown mud mortar. Rock sizes extend along a continuum from 0.08x0.14m to 0.11x0.18m.

No other constructions articulate with U.1, implying that it was not part of a platform or surface-level edifice. Unit 1 might have functioned as a low terrace designed to slow erosion down the gentle northwest-to-southeast slope into the patio. Alternatively, U.1 may be a foundation for a free-standing perishable wall that blocked the flow of people, or breezes, into the patio. Artifacts are concentrated within roughly 4m of U.1 on the northwest, though nowhere are the numbers of items very large. This pattern may suggest a slight tendency to localize activities in the immediate environs of Str. 337-Sub1-1st in antiquity.

Time Span 3

After abandonment, Str. 337-Sub1-1st was buried by the natural deposition of S.3. This fine-textured, very hard-compacted, medium brown soil with numerous small root inclusions, blankets U.1 and S.1 and 2 by 0.07-0.28m. A very light scattering of rocks that probably fell from U.1 (F.1) was found within 0.21m of that element. The paucity of tumbled debris suggests that U.1 never stood much taller than it did when uncovered, nor did it support a construction containing significant quantities of rocks.

Suboperation 337-F

Suboperation 337F is a 1m-wide by 5.81m-long trench running at an azimuth of 101 degrees on the east side of the Site 337 patio. Structure 337-2-1st is 9.3m to the west while Str. 337-1-1st is 4.1m to the northwest. Digging here was pursued to a maximum depth of 0.56m beneath modern ground level in search of activity areas and/or features not discernible on the surface. Though a light scattering of artifacts was recovered during these investigations, no architecture or clear signs of localized human behavior came to light. The work was directed by

L. True from March 6-11, 1992.

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	S.1, 2	LCLIII?

Time Span 1

Stratum 1, a moderately coarse-textured, hard-compacted, reddish-brown clay containing large numbers of small rocks, was revealed in the base of excavation. This soil was uncovered to a maximum thickness of 0.31m (its base lies outside excavation limits) and it ascends 0.22m across 4.42m southeast-to-northwest. Stratum 1 in Subop. 337F is identical, in composition and stratigraphic position, to S.1 revealed in Subop. 337E, 9.3m to the west. Comparing the elevations of these levels indicates that S.1 rises a total of 0.7m across 19.84m southeast-to-northwest. Stratum 1 is culturally sterile, as it was in Subop. 337E, strongly suggesting that there was no human presence in the area while it was forming.

Stratum 2 covers S.1 by 0.27-0.34m and consists of a fine-textured, moderately hard-compacted, micaceous brown soil in which a very few rocks are included. Artifacts retrieved from this level probably represent material washing out from deposits associated with buildings and activities lying to the west.

Chronological Summary

Site 337 appears to have been occupied soon after soil started forming on a recently exposed rocky surface that had not previously supported substantial human occupation. When this initial settlement occurred is unclear. Artifacts pertaining to the interval predating the construction of investigated buildings are relatively sparse. Based on evaluation of the available evidence, however, we would estimate that the earliest known human presence at Site 337 dates to the transition between Late Classic II and III. This period was soon followed by a major upsurge in activity during Late Classic III; all of the architecture revealed in excavations was raised now and the settlement's population most likely reached its peak during this span. There is some slight evidence of continued use of Strs. 337-1-1st, 337-2-1st, and 337-Sub1-1st during the succeeding Early Postclassic, though no construction can be assigned to this period. The paucity of Early Postclassic diagnostics in the analyzed collections suggests that Site 337's population was in decline by this point. No signs of Late Postclassic or Historic settlement at Site 337 were identified.