

1985

PSB OP 149-Excavation Report

Edward Schortman
schortma@kenyon.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital.kenyon.edu/honduras>



Part of the Archaeological Anthropology Commons

Recommended Citation

Schortman, Edward, "PSB OP 149-Excavation Report" (1985). *Four Valleys Archive*. Paper 73331.
<https://digital.kenyon.edu/honduras/73331>

This Excavation Report is brought to you for free and open access by the Anthropology at Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Four Valleys Archive by an authorized administrator of Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact noltj@kenyon.edu.

Site 149

Site 149 occupies the east margin of the high terrace in the Las Huertas/Hondo pocket. Site 52 lies 147m west and slightly downslope from Site 149; Site 51 is 115m south and across a quebrada from the settlement. The Rio Las Huertas is 575m to the north and the Rio Juncuntal is roughly 125m to the south. Fourteen structures and three features comprise Site 149. The constructions make up three clusters each of which is organized around a patio (Strs. 149-1/4, Feats. 1-3; Strs. 149-5/9; Strs. 149-10/13) with Str. 149-14 isolated to the west. Each aggregate occupies a low (no more than 1.5m high) rise above the terrace surface. Vesicular basalt outcrops are found throughout the site, primarily on the aforementioned low eminences. Structures 149-1, 3, 4, 8, and Feat. 3 were excavated under the direction of P. Urban and E. Schortman over the course of May 15-17, 1985; approximately 20 person-days being invested in clearing 30m².

Structure 149-1

Structure 149-1 occupies the south flank of its patio group, lying 12m south and across the patio from Str. 149-4 and 9.5m southwest of Str. 149-3. Subop. 149F, a 1x8.9m trench, bisected the building from north to south, reaching maximum depths of 0.44m below ground surface south and 0.36m below ground surface north of construction while cutting through a maximum of 0.4m of construction fill. A single building phase was recognized in the course of this work.

Excavation Lots

<u>Lot</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Date</u>
149F/1	28 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	?
149F/2	empty	Preconstruction	-
149F/3	empty	Fill	?
149F/4	7 sherds 2 figurine fragments 1 obsidian blade	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC?
149F/5	10 sherds	Fill	LC
149F/6	100 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	?

3 metate fragments

149F/7 1	52 sherds	Terminal Debris (Primary)	?
149F/8	empty	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	?

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	-	?
2	Str. 149-1-1st	U.1-8	-	-	LC
3	-	-	S.3	F.1,2	-

Time Span 1

Two soil levels, S.1 and 2, both of which contain considerable quantities of gravel, were deposited prior to the erection of Str. 149-1-1st (the basal walls of this platform were set on and into these layers). Stratum 1 was uncovered to a maximum thickness of 0.1m north of construction and was distinguished by its yellowish color. Stratum 2, on the south, is a reddish-brown clay and, unlike its relatively level northern counterpart, ascends 0.08m over the 0.32m it was its exposed running north-south (revealed to a maximum thickness of 0.08m). The base of neither stratum was encountered nor was there any evidence of cultural material associated with S.1 and 2. It seems likely that these elements were introduced shortly before work on Str. 149-1-1st began.

Time Span 2

Structure 149-1-1st is a low stone-faced platform that may have achieved its final form by several steps. Unit 1, with an exposed height of 0.26m and width of 0.27m, was likely an earlier basal northern platform facing later buried during construction of U.3 and 4. Unit 1 is backed on the south by a fill of variously sized stones set in a brown earth matrix (U.1a). Though this interpretation remains tentative, it is clear that U.1 and 1a did not protrude above the tops of later building elements (such as U.3 and 6 which bracket U.1 and 1a on the north and south, respectively). Units 1 and 1a, therefore, probably mark Str. 149-1-1st's northern limits prior to the building's enlargement in this direction.

Units 2-6 are part of that later expansion. Units 5 is the northernmost facing; preserved 0.2m high and 0.2m wide, it is backed to the south by a fill of medium to small stones set in a mud matrix (U.2). Unit 5 is set 0.03m into S.1. The terrace created by U. 2 and 5 is 0.9m wide north-south and gives way to U.3, a stone-faced riser that provides access to the summit. Unit 3 was exposed to a maximum

height of 0.4m, but most likely protruded only ca. 0.2m above the top of U. 2 on the north. Unit 3 measures 0.43m across and is backed by U.4, a fill composed of stones set in a brown soil. Unit 4 was packed in over the 0.6m between U. 3 and the putative earlier facing, U.1. Units 1 and 1a were apparently incorporated into the hearting of Str. 149-1-1st at this point. Unit 6, located approximately 1.73m south of U.3's northern face, is a stone wall standing a preserved ca. 0.32m high. This element rises to a point approximately equal to the top of U.3; rather than being a step-up, U.3 seems to mark the northern limits of a summit paving comprised of small to medium-size stones (U.8). Unit 8 is roughly 2.98m wide north-south and incorporates a metate fragment in its surface. A dense concentration of ceramics was found *in situ* stop this floor (152 sherds within ca. 1m²). The southern platform margin is defined by a 0.45m-high stone facing, providing a single ascent to the summit. There is a 0.22m discrepancy in the basal elevations of U.5 and 7, suggesting that Str. 149-1-1st was built over a gradual south to north ascent towards the patio. All walls were fashioned using light colored, fine-textured angular rocks set in a brown mud mortar; some effort was made to place the flatter faces of these stones facing outward. The rocks were not set in clear, horizontal courses. Rock sizes range from 0.03x0.03m to 0.19x0.39m, with most falling towards the middle of that range. Overall, Str. 149-1-1st measured 6.07m north-south, rose 0.43-0.45m high and supported at least one summit room that was partially paved with stones, and was oriented 88 to 95 degrees.

Time Span 3

Following abandonment, Str. 149-1-1st was buried by S.2, a brown, organic-rich soil with relatively few included stones. Stratum 2 is 0.24-0.43m thick where it overlies S.1 and includes tumbled stones from U.5 and 7 (F.1 and 2 respectively). Feature 1 is a light concentration of dislodged rocks extending 0.48m north of U.5 while its southern counterpart contains more stones and is found up to 0.9m beyond U.7. Unit 7, which was tipping out to the south when excavated, may have sustained more severe damage from erosion than did U.5. Such an outcome might be expected given U.7's location on the building's downslope side.

Structure 149-3

Structure 149-3, defining the east patio flank, is 9.5m northeast of Str. 149-1 and 6m southeast of Str. 149-4. This edifice was investigated by two mutually aligned but unconnected trenches set off the building's southwest (Subop. 149E, 1x2.1m) and northeast flanks (Subop. 149D, 1x4.5m). Excavations reached maximum depths of 0.41m and 0.53m below modern ground surface southwest and northeast of construction respectively. A single construction phase was revealed during the course of this work.

Excavation Lots

<u>Lot</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Date</u>
149D/01	15 sherds 1 metate fragment	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	LC, EPC

149D/02	30 sherds 1 metate fragment	Terminal Debris (Secondary) and Preconstruction Soil Deposition	LC
149D/03	15 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	?
149D/04	26 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	?
149E/01	70 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	?
149E/02	67 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	EPC
149E/03	47 sherds	Mixed Terminal Debris (Secondary) and Preconstruction Soil Deposition	LC, EPC

Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.1	-	-
2	Str. 149-3-1st	U.1,2	-	-	LC, EPC
3	-	-	S.2	F.1,2	-

Time Span 1

Stratum 1, a mottled tan-to-yellow soil including numerous small stones, underlies exposed construction and was likely deposited prior to the raising of Str. 149-3-1st. Outcrops of a fine-grained, light colored rock (possibly andesite) protrude from this level, suggesting that S.1 buries the local parent rock to only a limited extent (S.1 was uncovered to a thickness of 0.04-0.14m; its base was not encountered). The likely source of this gravel-rich soil lies in the hills immediately to the east. There is no evidence of cultural material clearly associated with this stratum.

Time Span 2

Structure 149-3-1st is a low platform faced by stone retaining walls on the southwest and northeast (U.1 and 2 respectively). Unit 1 ascends a preserved 0.29m while its northeastern counterpart survived to 0.35m high. Both walls are constructed of angular fragments of light colored, fine-grained stones, similar to the material seen outcropping nearby on low eminences within the high terrace and in the bordering hills. Rock sizes range from 0.05x0.06m to 0.3x0.32m, with most falling towards the center of that distribution (e.g., 0.12x0.17m). Neither unit exhibits clear horizontal coursing nor are chinking stones common. All stones are set in a brown mud mortar. Units 1 and 2 rest on (U. 2) or extend 0.01m into S.1 (U.1). Both apparently provided direct access to Str. 149-3-1st's summit. A possible second, stone-faced riser lies ca. 1m southwest of U.2's northeast face. If there was a second riser in this area, however, it was not well enough preserved to identify with any assuredness. Structure 149-3-1st's summit was not investigated. By the conclusion of TS 2, Str. 149-3-1st rose 0.29-0.35m high, measured 8.2m across southwest-northeast, and was aligned 351 to 353 degrees.

Time Span 3

Following abandonment, Str. 149-3-1st was covered by a brown, organic-rich clay with few stone inclusions (S.2). Stratum 2 is 0.02-0.46m thick and overlies S.1 as well as U.1 and 2. Features 1 and 2 are moderately dense concentrations of dislodged building stones extending 0.52m southwest and 1.42m northeast of U.1 and 2, respectively. Feature 2, in particular, is sufficiently extensive to suggest that its source, U.2, once stood significantly higher.

Structure 149-4

Structure 149-4 closes off the north patio flank, lying 12m north of Str. 149-1 and 6m northwest of Str. 149-3. The building was investigated by the digging of Subop. 149H, a 1x3.8m trench set against Str. 149-4's east flank. Excavation was pursued to a maximum depth of 0.46m below modern ground surface east of construction and 0.34m into construction fill, revealing a single building phase.

Excavation Lots

<u>Lot</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Date</u>
149H/01	21 sherds 1 censer fragment	Terminal Debris (Secondary) and Preconstruction Soil Deposition	EPC
149H/02	75 sherds 1 <u>bajareque</u> fragment 1 obsidian piece	Terminal Debris (Secondary) and Fill	?

Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
------------------	---------------------------	--------------	---------------	-----------------	-------------

1	-	-	S.1	-	-
2	Str. 149-4-1st	U.1-4	-	F.1	LC, EPC
3	-	-	S.2	F.2	-

Time Span 1

Stratum 1, a tan-to-yellow soil containing large quantities of small stones, underlies exposed construction and so must predate the erection of U.1-3. Stratum 1 was exposed to a thickness of 0.05-0.13m but its base was not encountered in the course of excavating Subop. 149H. No cultural material was clearly associated with S.1. This earth level likely represents colluvium washing down from the nearby eastern hills onto the high terrace.

Time Span 2

The east face of Str. 149-4-1st was ascended via at least two low, stone-faced risers (U.1 and 3). Unit 1 rises 0.33m above S.1 and gives way to a terrace that is 1.45m wide. This terrace is succeeded by U.3, a riser preserved at 0.28m high which, in turn, provides access to either a second terrace or, more likely, the building's summit. Unit 1 is backed by a fill composed of small (predominately) to medium-size rocks set in a brown earth matrix (U.2). Unit 4, the fill retained by U.3, closely resembles U.2 but contains more rocks. Feature 1 is a dense concentration of medium to large rocks found off the east face of U.1. It could be that F.1 comprises tumbled stone from U.1. At least one of the component rocks protrudes 0.14m into S.1, however, and appears to have been set vertically (no other dislodged stones are found outside S.2). This stratigraphic relationship, coupled with the apparent purposeful placement of several of the rocks, points to F.1 as a late addition made to Str. 149-4-1st's east face. Feature 1 may have been, therefore, a stone-faced step ascending 0.22m above S.1 and continuing 0.46m back (west) to U.1. The latter would have projected ca. 0.13m above F.1, acting as a second step leading towards the summit. Feature 1 is very casually constructed and was not recognized during the initial excavations. Units 1 and 3 are built of light colored, fine-textured angular stones 0.05x0.05m to 0.22x0.27m in size (the majority fall towards the center of this continuum, ca. 0.1x0.15m). All walls (including F.1) are set in a brown earth mortar; no clear horizontal coursing of the rocks was noted. Structure 149-4-1st's east flank rose, therefore, 0.61m, was faced by at least two (possibly three by the conclusion of occupation) stone-faced terraces, and was oriented 5 to 16 degrees.

Time Span 3

Stratum 2, a brown, organic-rich clay with few stone inclusions, overlies S.1 and most of the exposed construction by 0.02-0.33m. Feature 2, a light scattering of stones apparently fallen from U.1 and, possibly, F.1, is embedded within S.2 and extends 0.43m east of F.1.

Structure 149-8

Structures 149-5/9 surround a patio that Str. 149-8 closes off on the southwest. Structures 149-9 and 149-7 are 4m to the northwest and 6m to the north respectively while Str. 149-3 is 43m to the southwest. Suboperations 149B and C together comprise a single trench (1x8.7m) that cuts completely across the building northeast-southwest, extending down to 0.36m and 0.28m below modern ground surface beyond and within construction. A single building phase was revealed in the course of this work.

Excavation Lots

<u>Lot</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Date</u>
149B/01	110 sherds 2 mano fragments 5 obsidian pieces	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	?
149B/02	200 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary) and Fill	LC
149C/01	112 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	?
149C/02	355 sherds 9 obsidian pieces	Terminal Debris (Secondary) and Fill	LC, EPC
149C/03	127 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary) and Fill	LC, EPC

Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	Str. 149-8-1st	U.1-7	-	-	LC, EPC
2	-	-	S.1	F.1,2	-

Time Span 1

Structure 149-8-1st is a low, stone-faced platform the northeast and southwest basal facings of which are U.1 and 4. The former rises a preserved 0.28m while the latter stands 0.31m high. Both walls are fashioned of angular chunks of light colored, fine-grained material with the flatter aspects oriented outwards. Rock sizes vary from 0.08x0.12m to 0.2x0.24m with most measurements hovering around 0.15x0.18m. Stones are set in a brown mud mortar and do not exhibit clear horizontal courses. Unit 1 is 0.6m thick and provides access to a stone pavement the rocks of which are set in a brown mud mortar and measure, primarily, 0.04m in diameter (U.2). Larger stones, ca. 0.18x0.2m, are interspersed among the smaller rocks. Unit 2 gives way after 1.34m to a poorly preserved summit feature (defined by U.3, 5, and 6). Unit 3 is a 0.22m-high stone wall set on top of U.2 that apparently served to retain a brown earth-and-stone fill (U.6) that extends 2.96m to the southwest. Unit 5 retains this fill on the southwest, standing a preserved 0.25m high and located 0.96m northeast of U.4, the southwest basal facing. Unit 4, in turn, is backed by a fill composed of stone set in a brown earth matrix (U.7). Unit 7 buries the lower 0.14m of U.5, suggesting that the latter was visible for only 0.11m when the building was in use. Portions of outcrops were apparently incorporated into U.5 and 6, suggesting that Str. 149-8-1st was built around sizeable natural rock exposures. Encompassing these extrusions in construction reduced the amount of labor needed to raise the platform.

Structure 149-8-1st, by the end of TS 1, rose approximately 0.3 tall and, measured 6.08m across northeast-southwest. Units 3, 5, and 6 are the remnants of a raised stone-faced construction surmounting the summit. Together, they may have comprised a bench that was 0.22m high by 2.96m wide and faced northeast towards the patio over a paved floor.

Time Span 2

Stratum 2, a brown, organic-rich soil with few stone inclusions, overlies Str. 149-8-1st. This earth level was exposed to a maximum thickness of 0.38m, though its base was not uncovered. Features 1 and 2 consist of tumbled stones, embedded in S.2, originally derived from U.1 and 4 respectively. Feature 1 extends 0.9m northeast of U.1 and is a fairly light concentration of dislodged architectural debris. Its southwestern counterpart, however, was found for up to 1.08m southwest of U.4 and contains more rocks. Unit 4 may, therefore, have suffered more from erosion following abandonment than did U.1 and possibly stood somewhat higher during the structure's use than it was recorded in our investigations.

Feature 3

Feature 3, ca. 3m northwest of Str. 149-1, is a line of stone visible on the surface that lacks elevation. This construction is situated on the west flank of the Str. 149-1/4, Feat. 1,3-4 patio and was examined by means of Subop. 149G, a 1x2.16m trench dug against the feature's west, non-patio-facing side. Excavations were carried to a maximum depth of 0.24m below modern ground surface west of construction, tentatively revealing a single building phase.

Excavation Lot

<u>Lot</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Date</u>
149G/01	45 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	?

2 obsidian pieces

and Preconstruction Soil Deposition

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	-	-
2	Feature 3-1st	U.1	-	-	?
3	-	-	S.2	-	-

Time Span 1

Stratum 1, a tan soil containing large quantities of small rocks, underlies construction and rises 0.15m from west to east over an exposed 1.18m. This layer was uncovered to a maximum thickness of 0.09m, though its base was not encountered. Numerous larger rocks protrude from S.1, suggesting that bedrock is not much deeper. Approximately 0.12m of S.2, a fine-grained, brown, organic-rich clay incorporating large numbers of small white stones, overlies S.1 and runs under Feature 3-1st. It seems likely that both strata were deposited prior to the construction of U.1.

Time Span 2

Unit 1 is the sole element of Feature 3-1st uncovered during excavation (based on surface evidence, it is probably the sum total of Feature 3-1st construction). Unit 1 is a wall standing 0.44m high, measuring 0.6m wide, and aligned 4 degrees. The stones comprising the unit are irregularly shaped chunks of light colored, fine-grained material (possibly andesite) combined with at least one fragment of a softer material (also light in color), all set in a brown mud mortar. The flatter faces of the rocks are oriented out to the west. Stones here are generally large, 0.15x0.38m to 0.42x0.81m. Feature 3-1st does not appear to have been a foundation for a surface-level building; more likely it served as a terrace designed to slow erosion down this slope.

Time Span 3

Stratum 2 resumed deposition following the abandonment of Feature 3-1st, obscuring S.1 and only the lower 0.03m of U.1. This layer is 0.16-0.26m thick where it runs over S.1. Tumbled architectural debris was scarce in Subop. 149G, implying that U.1 was never much higher than its preserved 0.44m.

Chronological Summary

Most of the architecture described above was raised during the Late Classic, though the site remained in use into the Early Postclassic. All excavated buildings, save Str. 149-1-1st, show evidence of Early Postclassic use. Analyses of artifacts associated with the final occupation of Str. 149-4-1st point to Early Postclassic habitation, there being few Late Classic diagnostics in lot 149H/1. The nature of Str. 149-4-1st's architecture and its integration within a structure group whose other components were erected in the Late Classic strongly indicates that this edifice was raised during the latter interval as well. Feature 3-1st could not be dated; its stratigraphic position, resting above and not on the gravel level onto which the other studied buildings in its group were set, argues for its being a late addition, possibly raised during the Early Postclassic. Such a temporal attribution accords well with the casual nature of Feature 3-1st's architecture. Another candidate for Early Postclassic architecture is Str. 149-4-1st's F.1. This casual construction, appended onto the building's east side, was obviously introduced late in the building's occupancy and closely resembles additions dated to the Early Postclassic at other middle Ulua sites.

As at other settlements on the eastern margin of the Las Huertas/Hondo pocket, habitation at Site 149 apparently began soon after the deposition of a gravel-rich soil that incompletely covered native bedrock (see also Sites 51, 52, 150, and 153). Incorporation of outcrops into at least one construction, Str. 149-8-1st, supports this interpretation. The areas covered by investigated Site 149 buildings, therefore, may well have constituted marginal terrain for agriculture, pioneered late in local prehistory out of necessity (there being no better areas that remained unclaimed in the Las Huertas/Hondo pocket) and only just after landforms in that area had stabilized. After construction was completed, different, potentially more fertile soils were laid down across the site (the fine-grained, organic-rich S.2 clays described above). That Feature 3-1st was built sometime during the latter process, as indicated by its stratigraphic position within S.2, hints at its late construction date.

Architectural Summary

All investigated Site 149 constructions, with the exception of Feature 3-1st, were low, stone-faced platforms datable, for the most part, to the Late Classic. These buildings rose 0.29-0.61m, though three of the four are within the 0.29-0.45m range (Str. 149-4-1st is the exception). Basal facings are fashioned of light colored, fine-grained angular stones (probably andesite) that are usually, though not invariably, oriented with their naturally flatter faces looking outwards. No coursing was noted nor were chinking stones much in evidence. A brown mud was commonly used as a mortar within these walls. Stone sizes range from 0.03x0.03m to 0.3x0.32m, with most falling towards the center of that span (roughly 0.12x0.17m). Two cases showed evidence of low terraces providing summit access (Strs. 149-1-1st and 149-4-1st) while in the other two the summit was attained by stepping up and over a single riser. Summits were not intensively studied but the tops of Strs. 149-1-1st and 149-8-1st were at least partially paved and the latter supported a 0.22-high by 2.96m-long stone construction that might have served as a bench. The incorporation of natural rock outcrops into Str. 149-8-1st, though fairly unusual for prehistoric middle Ulua constructions, is not without precedent (see, for example, Str. 150-4-1st). Platform widths varied from 6.07m to 8.2m (n=3); two edifices having nearly identical measurements (Strs. 149-1-1st and 149-8-1st, covering 6.07m and 6.08m across respectively). Alignment of construction units diverged almost as much within a single structure as across excavated buildings

(accounted for, in large part, by varying degrees of preservation and the narrow exposures provided by our trenches). Nevertheless, orientations ranged from 358 to 16 degrees, suggesting a general preference for setting platforms to the cardinal directions.

Early Postclassic architecture is likely represented by Feature 3-1st and Str. 149-4-1st's F.1. Both are casual constructions that are relatively insubstantial. Feature 3-1st, a stone-faced terrace delimiting the western side of a patio, rises 0.44m and is oriented 4 degrees. Feature 1 is an apparent late addition to Str. 149-4-1st and consists of a 0.22m-high by 0.46m-wide stone riser set against that building's east side. The use of at least one rock set on end to define the riser's edge is diagnostic of middle Ulua Early Postclassic architecture. Light colored, fine-textured angular rocks, similar to those employed in Late Classic constructions at Site 149, were found in Early Postclassic building efforts. Stone sizes may have been larger in the latter constructions; at least this seems to be the case for Feature 3-1st whose component rocks measure 0.15x0.38m to 0.42x0.81m.