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PSB OP 301 Excavation Report

Edward Schortman
schortma@kenyon.edu

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Site 301

Site 301 occupies the north bank of the Quebrada Aguacate/Zapote, ca. 100m west of Site 300 and the same distance northwest and across the aforementioned stream channel from Site 302. The six constructions identified here from surface remains run at a right angle from the Quebrada Aguacate/Zapote. They start ca. 50m north of the stream and extend in a north-south line of about 53m and are generally low with limited spatial extents. Structures 1 and 5 were dug here resulting in the clearing of 13.95m². The work was completed over the course of two days during the 1985 field season and was overseen by Julie Miller.

Structure 301-1

Structure 301-1 is the northernmost construction in the aforementioned line and, on the surface, appeared to be an east-facing terrace measuring 10m north-south by 3m east-west. The building was investigated by the digging of two trenches: Subop. 301B, measuring 1x6m, cut across the edifice's approximate center and exposed its full width. Suboperation 301C is a 2x2m trench dug to expose Str. 301-1's south edge. The deepest excavations occurred within Subop. 301B where we reached depths of 1.08m and 1.05m below modern ground surface outside and within construction, respectively. Digging in Subop. 301C did not exceed 0.15m below current ground level. One construction phase was identified in the course of this work.

Excavation Lots

<u>Lot</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Time Span/Date</u>
301B/1	4 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	3,4/
301B/2	unprocessed	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	3,4/
301B/3	6 sherds	Preconstruction Occupation Debris (Secondary)	1,2/
301B/4	1 sherd	Preconstruction Occupation Debris (Secondary)	2/
301B/5	empty	Fill	3/
301C/1	empty	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	3,4/

Time Spans

Time Construction

<u>Span</u>	<u>Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.1,2	-	
2	-	-	S.3	F.2	
3	Str. 301-1-1st	U.1, 2	-	-	
4	-	-	S.4	F.1	

Time Span 1

Stratum 1, a lens composed of gravel set in a sandy soil, was uncovered over an area measuring 0.87m east-west in the eastern end of Subop. 301B. This soil layer ascends 0.2m across its exposed extent while its base was not revealed in our excavations. The equivalent stratigraphic unit in the west is S.2, a light brown sandy soil with few inclusions. Unlike S.1, S.2's exposed upper portion ran level for 1.84m from the western end of Subop. 301B eastward. Relations between S.1 and 2 were not revealed and their distinct compositions suggest that they were deposited as the result of different natural processes. The paucity of artifacts that could be assigned to this interval tentatively implies that the immediate area was not occupied, or at least not occupied intensively, when S.1 and 2 were laid down.

Time Span 2

This span is marked by the deposition of S.3, a medium-brown, clayey sand with moderate amounts of small sand inclusions. Stratum 3 blankets S.1 and 2 and is 0.36-0.46m thick (minimally; its full depth was not exposed on the east). This earth layer's upper surface is more-or-less level over its exposed 3.95m running east-west, dropping 0.05m over this extent primarily on the east where it runs over S.1. Stratum 3's base follows the slope of S.1 down into the base of excavation where it is lost beyond the limits of Subop. 301B.

The dense concentration of medium-size stones found lying at the base of S.3 (F.2) seems to represent a different depositional process than those which yielded S.1-3. Feature 2 extends for 3m east-west and achieves a maximum thickness of 0.22m near its center. The rocks are generally flat-laid. Feature 2's behavioral significance, if any, is abundantly unclear; it may be part of a very casual construction or the result of natural forces.

The recovery of one pottery fragment from S.3 may hint at a slight human occupation in the area when this earth layer was deposited. We cannot, however, discount the possibility that this artifact infiltrated the layer from upper, later deposits.

Time Span 3

Structure 301-1-1st is represented by a substantial stone wall (U.1). Where it is best preserved in Str.1's approximate center, U.1 stands 0.72m tall and measures 1.04m across (east-west). Unit 1 is made of unmodified river cobbles the naturally flatter faces of which are not consistently oriented outwards. The wall's outer facings contain a culturally sterile fill composed of densely packed small to medium-sized river-rounded rocks set in a brown earth matrix. The southern limit of Str. 301-1-1st is defined by U.2. Only the uppermost portion of U.2 was exposed in Subop. 301C, though it was apparently fashioned in the same way as U.1 and forms a clear termination of that wall.

Structure 301-1-1st, therefore, seems to have been a ca. 1.04m thick stone-faced and -filled wall that rose 0.72m above S.3 on which it rests, and was aligned roughly 345 degrees. Very few artifacts were associated with this construction, suggesting that it was not a focal point for actions involving sizable numbers of imperishable materials.

Time Span 4

All but the uppermost 0.06m of Str 301-1-1st was covered by the deposition of a medium to dark-brown, clayey soil with few stone inclusions (S.4). Stratum 4 is, maximally, 0.68m thick where adjoins U.1 and contains a light scattering of medium to large cobbles that may have fallen from that construction (F.1). The rocks comprising F.2 were found up to 0.74m west and 2.07m east of U.1 and were not continuous over this extent.

Structure 301-5

Structure 301-5 is the penultimate structure on the south in the line of constructions comprising Site 301. It is 1.5m north of Str. 301-6 and 20m south of Str. 301-1. Structure 301-5 was investigated by means of a 1x3.95m trench (Subop. 301D) that ran east-west across the building's full width. Digging was pursued to a maximum depth of 0.54m below modern ground surface outside construction over the course of which one construction phase was identified.

Excavation Lots

<u>Lot</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Time Span/Date</u>
301D/1	2 sherds, 1 obsidian flake	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	3/
301D/2	unprocessed (small lot)	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	3/
301D/3	unprocessed (small lot)	Preconstruction Occupation Debris (Secondary)	2/
301D/4	8 sherds 1 obsidian projectile point	Preconstruction Occupation Debris (Secondary)	2/
301D/5	empty	Preconstruction	1/

Time Spans

Time Construction

<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	Str. 301-5-1st	U.1	-	-	
4	-	-	S.3	F.1	

Time Span 1

Stratum 1 consists of a dense packing of river-rounded stones set in a loose gray soil matrix. Only 0.05m of S.1 was exposed in the western portion of the trench; S.1's base lies beyond our excavation limits. Stratum 1 runs fairly even over the 1.45m it was revealed running eastward from the western edge of excavation. The absence of artifacts recovered from this layer very tentatively points to the absence of a human occupation in the area when S.1 was laid down.

Time Span 2

This interval is marked by the deposition of S.2, a grayish brown soil containing large quantities of densely packed small to large cobbles. Stratum 2 is 0.4m thick on the west where it was exposed to its full extent and maintains a fairly even upper surface throughout the 3.95m length of the trench running east-west. The few artifacts retrieved from S.2 may indicate that there was a human presence in the vicinity when this stratum was laid down.

Time Span 3

Structure 301-5-1st consists of a wall (U.1) composed of unmodified cobbles that stands to a preserved height of 0.21m, is 0.28m wide, and is aligned approximately 320 degrees. Over its exposed 1m length (running northwest-southeast) U.1 is generally one stone high and wide. Unit 1 was apparently set 0.13m into S.2. Very few artifacts were found associated with Str. 301-5-1st and none could be definitively linked to the construction's use.

Time Span 4

All but the upper 0.1m of U.1 was covered by a grayish brown sandy clay with few included stones of any size (S.3). Stratum 3 was 0.06m thick west of U.1 and 0.15m thick east of that construction. One small cobble (F.1) lying 0.05m east of U.1 may have fallen from that construction after its abandonment. The near absence of tumbled architectural debris implies that U.1 was never much higher than it appeared when excavated.

Architectural Summary

Structures 301-1-1st and 301-5-1st are both fashioned using unmodified river stones that either lack naturally flatter aspects or do not have them consistently directed outwards. Chinking stones are not common in either case and the building style in each instance seems quite casual.

The size and form of Str. 301-5-1st strongly suggests that it is part of a boundary wall or, perhaps, a foundation for a surface-level building. The dense concentration of cobbles underlying Str. 301-5-1st's U.1 may well have been deposited by the nearby Quebrada Aguacate/Zapote. If this is the case, the artifacts found mixed with these rocks likely derived from another location than Site 301.

Structure 301-1-1st is a fairly substantial construction. That it definitively ends on the south implies that its U.1 and 2 were not parts of platform facings whereas the great width and height of these constructions argue against their having functioned as footings for perishable walls. Most likely, Str. 301-1-1st served as a terrace slowing erosion over land that slopes down to the east. This interpretation is supported by the drop offs noted in S.1 and 3 immediately east of U.1.

Chronological Summary

The artifacts recovered from excavations at Site 301 were few in number and generally heavily eroded. Consequently, they could not be used with any confidence to date different periods in the settlement's occupation. The shallowness of Str. 301-5-1st's construction (U.1) raises questions about its prehispanic origins; it may well be part of a wall raised in relatively recent times. Structure 301-1-1st's more substantial construction and deeper burial tentatively point to an earlier construction date, though we cannot definitely place it within a prehistoric phase. It may well be, therefore, that the six constructions that comprise Site 301 pertain to different temporal spans though we cannot pin down the dates of their construction and use.