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PSB OP 312 Excavation Report

Edward Schortman
schortma@kenyon.edu

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Site 312

Site 312 is 150m southwest of Site 310, 125m southwest of Site 311, and 700m north of the Quebrada Aguacate/Zapote. The settlement consists of 10 buildings arranged in two separate groups organized according two distinct principles; Strs. 312-1/5 are arranged linearly in a gently curving crescent running generally east-west and open on the south whereas Strs. 312-6/10 form a tightly clustered aggregate 85m to the south. Structures 312-6, 7, 9, and 10 form a patio-focused group, the central space being open on the southwest; Str. 312-8 is a small isolated building lying 9m to the east of the cluster. Structures 312-1, 7, and 9 were excavated from April 24-26, 1985 under the direction of Thomas Melchionne, Daniel Brennan, and Julie Benyo. These trenches measured 1m-wide and were dug against one side of the investigated building. All told, 15.3m² were cleared here.

Structure 312-1

Structure 312-1 is the eastern-most edifice in the linear arrangement of five buildings that defines the northern limits of Site 312. Structure 312-2 is 6.5m to the northwest. Structure 312-1 has indistinct lines and stands 0.28m above modern ground surface. Excavations here took the form of a 1m-wide by 6m-long trench (Subop. 312B) that cut across the building from beyond its north limits to the summit's southern border (6m² cleared in all). Digging here was pursued to a maximum depth of 0.96m below modern ground surface. No architecture was identified in the course of this work; at present, it appears that Str. 312-1 was not the result of human endeavors.

Excavation Lots

<u>Lot</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Time Span/Date</u>
312B/1	empty	-	1/
312B/2	empty	-	1/
312B/3	empty?	-	1/
312B/4	sherds (unprocessed)	Occupation Debris (Secondary)	1/?
312B/5	empty	-	1/
312B/6	empty	-	1/
312B/7	3 sherds, 2 jute shells	Occupation Debris (Secondary)	1/?
312B/8	empty	-	1/
312B/9	8 jute shells	Occupation Debris (Secondary)	1/
312B/10	empty	-	1/
312B/11	2 sherds, 22 jute shells	Occupation Debris (Secondary)	1/?

Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
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1 - - S.1 - ?

Time Span 1

Time Span 1 witnessed the deposition of a brown soil, at least 0.96m thick, distinguished by a generally dense concentration of very small (gravel) to medium-size stones (S.1; the layer's base was not revealed in Subop. 312B). The rocks are roughly equally divided between those which are rounded, likely by water action, and the remainder which appear to be angular. The density of included stones declines within the area excavated with Subop. 312B from south-to-north, the greatest concentration being localized in the southern 3m of the trench where the ground is also slightly higher than it is on the south. On reflection, it seems that what we defined as a structure was actually a deposit of rocks that was most likely deposited by natural means. The generally crescent arrangement of Strs. 312-1-5 may, thus, reflect less human design principles and more the action of some natural process, such as levee creation along the banks of an undetected water course. The few artifacts found in excavations here may point to a human presence somewhere in the area when S.1 was being laid down. If this layer includes materials washed in from other locales, there is no reason to think that the artifacts derived from Str. 312-1's immediate vicinity.

Structure 312-7

Structure 312-7 lies 13m northeast of Str. 312-9 just beyond and northeast of the patio delimited by Strs. 312-6, 312-9, and 312-10. A trench (Subop. 312D) measuring 1m-wide by 2.8m long was dug against the edifice's northeast flank (2.8m² cleared in all). Excavations were pursued to maximum depths of 0.9m and 0.89m below modern ground surface within and beyond construction, respectively, revealing remnants of two major construction phases.

Excavation Lots

<u>Lot</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Time Span/Date</u>
312D/1	30 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	3/LCL?
312D/2	51 sherds, 7 obsidian pieces, 15 jute shells	Mix, Terminal and Occupation Debris	1,3/?
312D/3	60 sherds, 5 obsidian pieces, 11 jute shells, 9 bajareque fragments	Occupation Debris (Secondary)	1/?

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. 312-7-2nd	U.1	-	-	?
3	Str. 312-7-1st	U.2, 3	-	-	LCL?
4	-	-	S.1	F.1	-

Time Span 1

During this interval at least 0.14m of a brown soil (S.1) was laid down (S.1's base was not encountered in our excavations). The considerable amounts of cultural material recovered in this limited exposure point to a significant human presence in the area when this segment of S.1 was being deposited.

Time Span 2

Excavations in Subop. 312D revealed what was likely the east wall (U.1) of Str. 312-7-2nd. Unit 1 is a cobble construction that stands 0.26m high, is 0.46m wide, and aligned roughly 352 degrees. It is unclear if U.1 was a facing that retained fill to the west or a foundation, set directly on ancient ground surface, that formerly supported a perishable wall. Unit 1 is made of unmodified cobbles set in a mud mortar.

Time Span 3

Unit 1 was subsequently covered by a deposit of small to medium-size stones set in a brown earth matrix (U.3) and retained on the northeast by U.2. The latter construction stands 0.34m high and is oriented 295 degrees. It appears that Unit 2 was the northeast basal facing for Str. 312-7-1st, an earthen-floored platform; this facing rises directly to the building's summit.

Time Span 4

Following Str. 312-7-1st's abandonment, deposition of S.1 resumed, eventually covering all but the uppermost portions of TS.3 construction; as much as 0.54m of S.1 was laid down now. A moderately dense concentration of stones fallen from Str. 312-7-1st (F.1) was found overlying the exposed portion of the platform's summit and extending in much reduced numbers for 1.2m to the northeast of U.2.

Structure 312-9

Structure 312-9, lying 13m southwest of Str. 312-7 and 6m northwest of Str. 312-6, closes off the northeast side of the settlement's main patio. The building was investigated by the digging of a 1m-wide trench (Subop. 312C) for a distance of 6.5m starting beyond the edifice's eastern limits to a point about one-third of the way across its summit (6.5m² exposed in all). Digging was pursued to maximum depths of 0.75m and 0.8m below modern ground surface outside and within architecture, respectively. Two construction phases were identified in the course of this work.

Excavation Lots

<u>Lot</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Time Span/Date</u>
312C/1	18 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	3/LCL
312C/2	2 sherds, 4 bones	Mix, Terminal and Occupation Debris	1,3/?
312C/3	unprocessed (sherds)	Mix. Fill and Occupation Debris	1,3/?
312C/4	unprocessed (sherds)	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	3/EPC
312C/5 3	6 sherds	Fill	3/LCL

312C/6	unprocessed (sherds)	Fill	3/LCL?
312/7	130 sherds, 5 bajareque pieces	Fill	3/LCL?
312C/8	43 sherds	Occupation Debris (Secondary)	1/LCL
312C/9	unprocessed (sherds)	Fill	3/LCL?
312C/10	unprocessed (sherds)	Fill	3/LCL?

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. 312-9-2nd	U.1, 2, 7	-	-	LCL?
3	Str. 312-9-1st	U.1, 3-6	-	-	LCL, EPC
4	-	-	S.1	F.1	-

Time Span 1

During this span at least 0.42m of a brown soil (S.1) was laid down (S.1's base was not encountered in Subop. 312C). The recovery of some artifacts from the lowest portions of S.1 points to a human presence in the area during TS.1.

Time Span 2

The portions of Str. 312-9-2nd exposed in Subop. 312D are U.1, 2, and 7. Unit 1 is bounded on the east by a line of large stones (0.3m thick by 0.5m long) that is backed on the west by a 0.18m-thick layer of stones (all included in U.1). The latter pavement extends for 1.76m west from the back (west) side of the bordering U.1 rocks and is 0.14m below the top of those stones. Such horizontal and vertical relations imply that U.1 may be less a terrace facing than a formal portico set against Str. 312-9-2nd's east flank. Though excavation was not carried deep enough west of U.1 to ascertain its full extent, it appears that stones gave way to earth for the 1.99m separating U.1 and 2. Unit 2 is a stone wall estimated to have risen 0.26m above the level of U.1 and to have provided access to Str. 312-9-2nd's earthen-floored summit. The fill (U.7) backing U.2 on the west consists of a moderately dense concentration of cobbles set in a brown earth matrix.

Structure 312-9-2nd, as far as can be determined from our limited investigations, is a 0.26m-high, stone-faced, earth-and-stone filled platform fronted on the east by an extensive portico measuring 4.23m across; the eastern-most 1.76m of this surface was seemingly paved with stones while the rest was left as open dirt. Very little of the earthen-floored summit was exposed. The building was oriented approximately 351 degrees. All walls were made of unmodified cobbles the flatter aspects of which faced outwards; the U.1 pavement was also fashioned of river-worn stones. All rocks were set in a mud mortar.

Time Span 3

Structure 312-9-1st took form during this span. Unit 1's eastern-most 1.05m was retained and apparently continued to serve as a stone-surfaced portico on the platform's east side. Rising 0.22m above the still-visible stone floor of U.1 is U.3 which defines the east facing of a terrace. Unit's 3's stone-paved surface extends back (west) for 1.97m before being succeeded by U.4. The latter stood an inferred 0.29m tall and ran back 1.4m west to the 0.1m-high stone-step-up (U.5) to the earthen-floored summit. The fill retained by U.3-5 (U.6) is identical to U.7, i.e., a brown soil containing a moderately dense concentration of small to medium-size rocks, mostly cobbles.

In general, Str. 312-9-1st was a 0.61m-high stone-faced, earth-and-stone-filled platform that was faced on the east by three relatively broad (1.05-1.97m wide) surfaces (the still-visible portion of the earlier paved portico and two terraces) culminating in a low (0.1m-high) step up to the summit. The east portico and basal terrace's tread were paved with stones while the tread of the second ascending terrace and the summit were apparently left as exposed dirt. The edifice was aligned roughly 351 degrees, continuing the orientation of its immediate predecessor. All facings were made of unmodified cobbles the flatter faces of which were directed outwards; U.3's terrace pavement was also fashioned of cobbles. All stones were set in a mud mortar.

Time Span 4

As much as 0.37m of S.1 was deposited following Str. 312-9-1st's abandonment, resulting in the covering of all but the top-most parts of final-phase TS.3 architecture. A moderately dense concentrations of stones tumbled from TS.3 construction (F.1) was found overlying the U.3 terrace and extending in lesser densities for 0.74m east of U.1.

Architectural Summary

The limited portions of Strs. 312-7 and 312-9 that were uncovered reveal relatively modest stone-faced, stone-and-earth-filled platforms that stood 0.34m (Str. 312-7-1st) and 0.61m high (Str. 312-9-1st). Structures 312-7-2nd, 312-9-2nd, and 312-9-1st were aligned between 351-352 degrees whereas the final version of Str. 312-7-1st diverged from this orientation, being aligned 295 degrees. The most completely investigated edifice, Str. 312-9-1st, was fronted by a stone portico set flush with ancient ground surface on the east. This pavement was 1.05m wide and gave way to two ascending terraces standing 0.22 and 0.29m high and measuring 1.97m and 1.4m across, in ascending order. The tread of the basal terrace is paved with river-worn stones while that of the next higher terrace was left as earth. A 0.1m-high stone step-up provides access to the earthen-floored summit.

All walls and pavements were fashioned using river cobbles set in a mud mortar. In the case of walls and facings, the flatter aspects of these rocks were directed outwards.

Chronological Summary

A very limited sample of the artifacts recovered from excavations at Site 312 were analyzed. These all pertain to terminal debris contexts at Str. 312-9-1st where they point to use of the building during the Late Classic into the Early Postclassic. Most likely this platform was originally built during the former interval. Structure 312-7-1st's architecture indicates a similar period of construction and use. Though no materials were unequivocally associated with Str. 312-7-2nd and 312-9-2nd, the nature of their construction points to a similar period of building and use. We cannot, at this point, temporally

place the intervals pre-dating these constructions (TS. 1 in each case) except to say that they can be no later than Late Classic in date. Structure 312-1 may well be a natural deposit of stone and earth including some artifacts. Though none of this scant material was analyzed, the likelihood that it was re-deposited here raises the possibility that these items derived from outside Site 312.