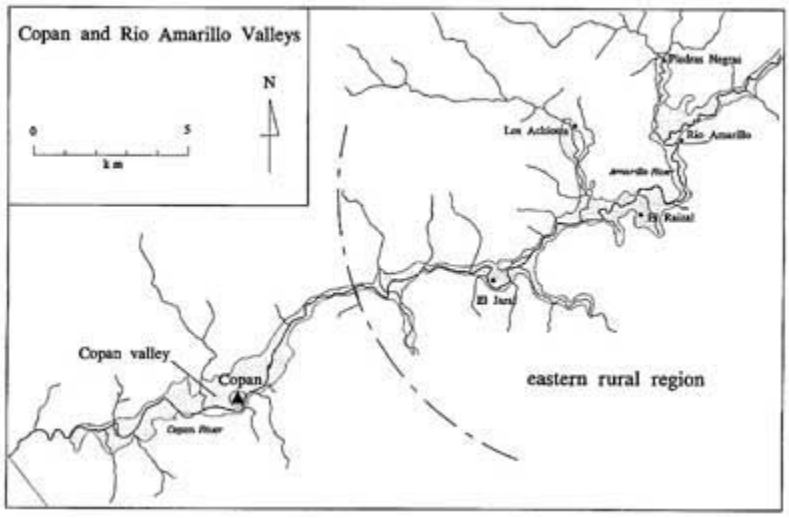
Ancient Maya Political Centers: Rural Copán Survey and Excavation at El Raizal, Honduras



Research Year: 1998
Culture: Maya
Chronology: Late Classic
Location: Copán, Honduras
Site: El Raizal Valley

Table of Contents

Submitted 02/01/1999 by:
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Introduction

In ancient Maya society, the relationship between large urban areas and the outlying rural regions that surround them have remained poorly understood. This inadequacy results partly from traditional archaeological research of the Classic Maya that has too often concentrated on polity capitals and associated settlement, even though the importance of center-periphery relationships in complex societies have long been recognized. To address this crucial question, new research strategies are adopting a more balanced approach that focuses equivalently on all the sociological units (households, communities, civic centers) recognizable in the rural settlement (cf. de Montmollin 1988). Since this research avoids extrapolating (down or up) from one analytical unit to another, it represents a more detailed analysis of rural settlement that can not only provide a sociological model for the structure and organization of the rural areas, but also trace its relationship to the neighboring urban areas through time.

Investigations of rural settlement near the Classic Maya polity of Copán, Honduras represent one of the earliest attempts to integrate rural settlement with a large polity capital (Figure 1). In the course of these investigations a model of urban consumption and rural production was developed (cf. Webster and Gonlin 1988; Webster and Freter 1990; Freter 1994:167; Sanders 1989:99). Since 1996, new research has been re-examining this urban-rural model by conducting further survey, mapping and excavation in this rural region (Figure 2). This research, conducted by the Río Amarillo Rural Survey project (RARS), has gathered results that help outline a new sociological model for both center-periphery and intra-rural socio-political relations.

In the 1998 season, the RARS project undertook an intensive survey and excavation program at the large rural center known as El Raizal. El Raizal is located in a small valley to the south of the Amarillo River, created by Quebrada Raizal, a small tributary to the larger river (Figure 3). Although this site has been mentioned and sketched by previous researchers (Vlcek and Fash 1986), it has never been the subject of a more specific and concerted research. A research program consisting of surveying and excavations was conducted during a sixteen-week period between March 1st and June 1st, 1998. This final report of the 1998 field season is presented to FAMSI and includes the description and figures of the survey, site mapping, horizontal excavations, and test excavations at El Raizal. This report describes each of these activities.

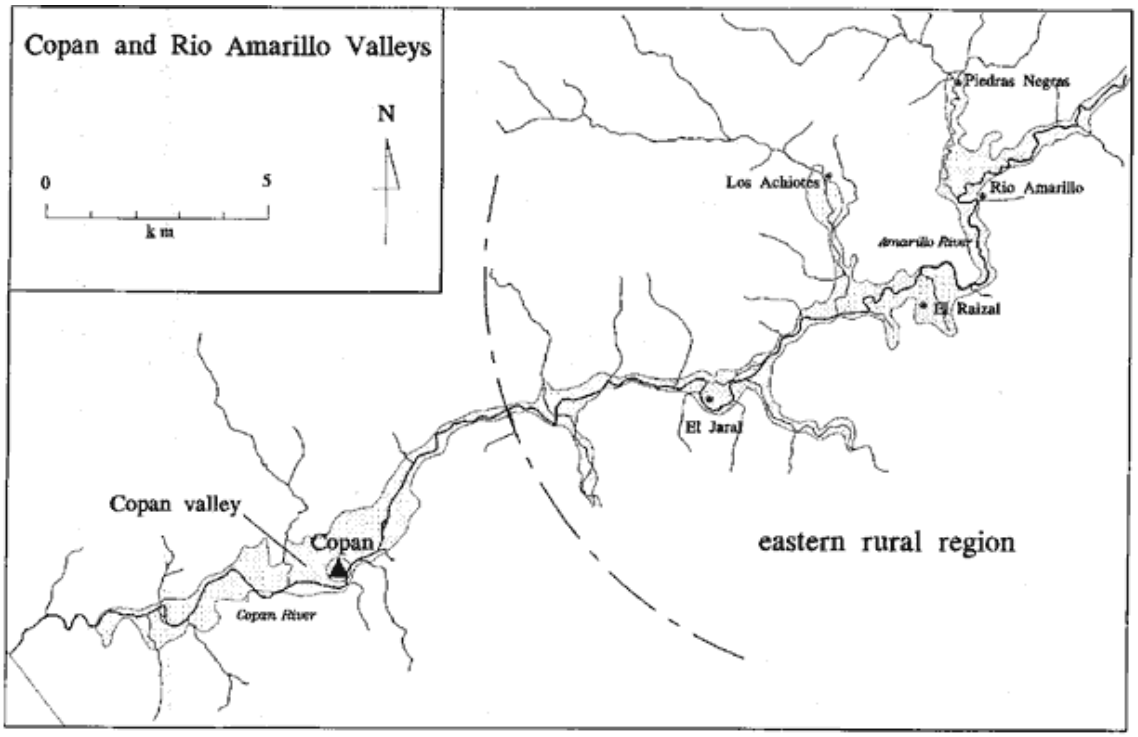

Figure 1: Copán and Río Amarillo Valleys.

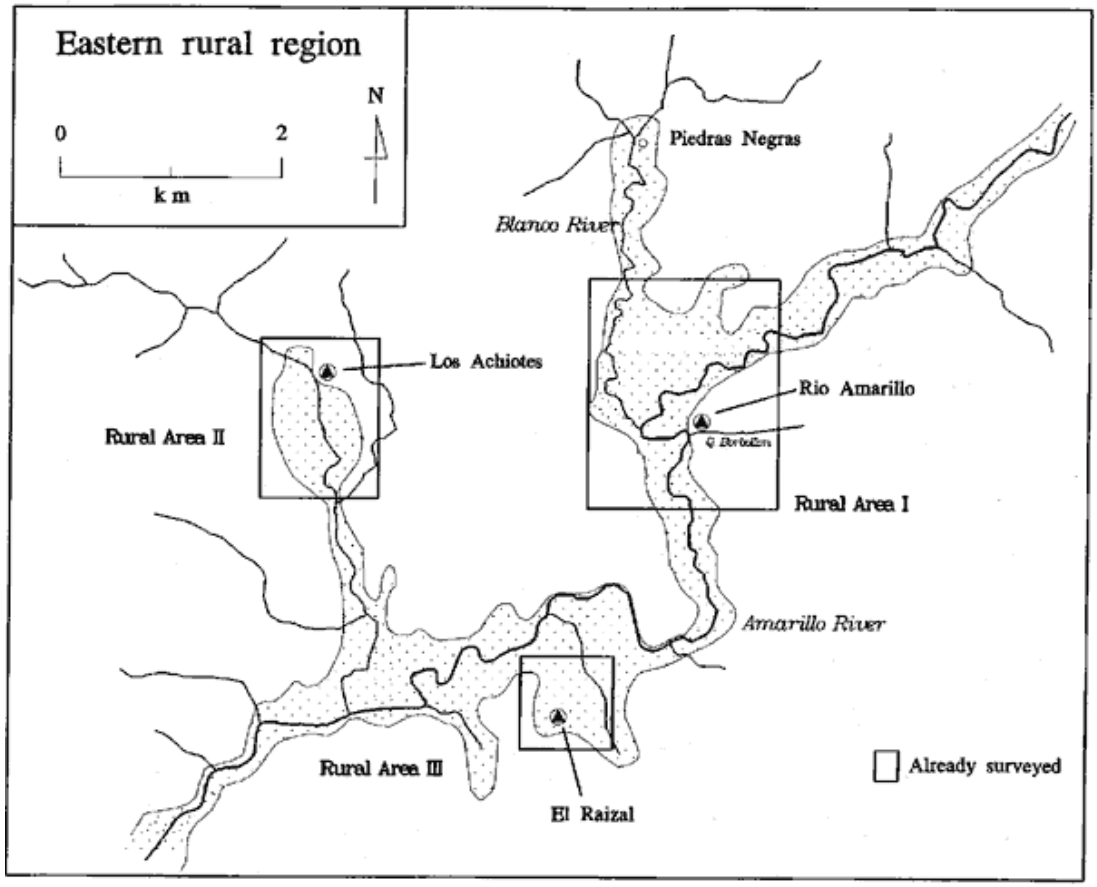

Figure 2: Eastern Rural Region.

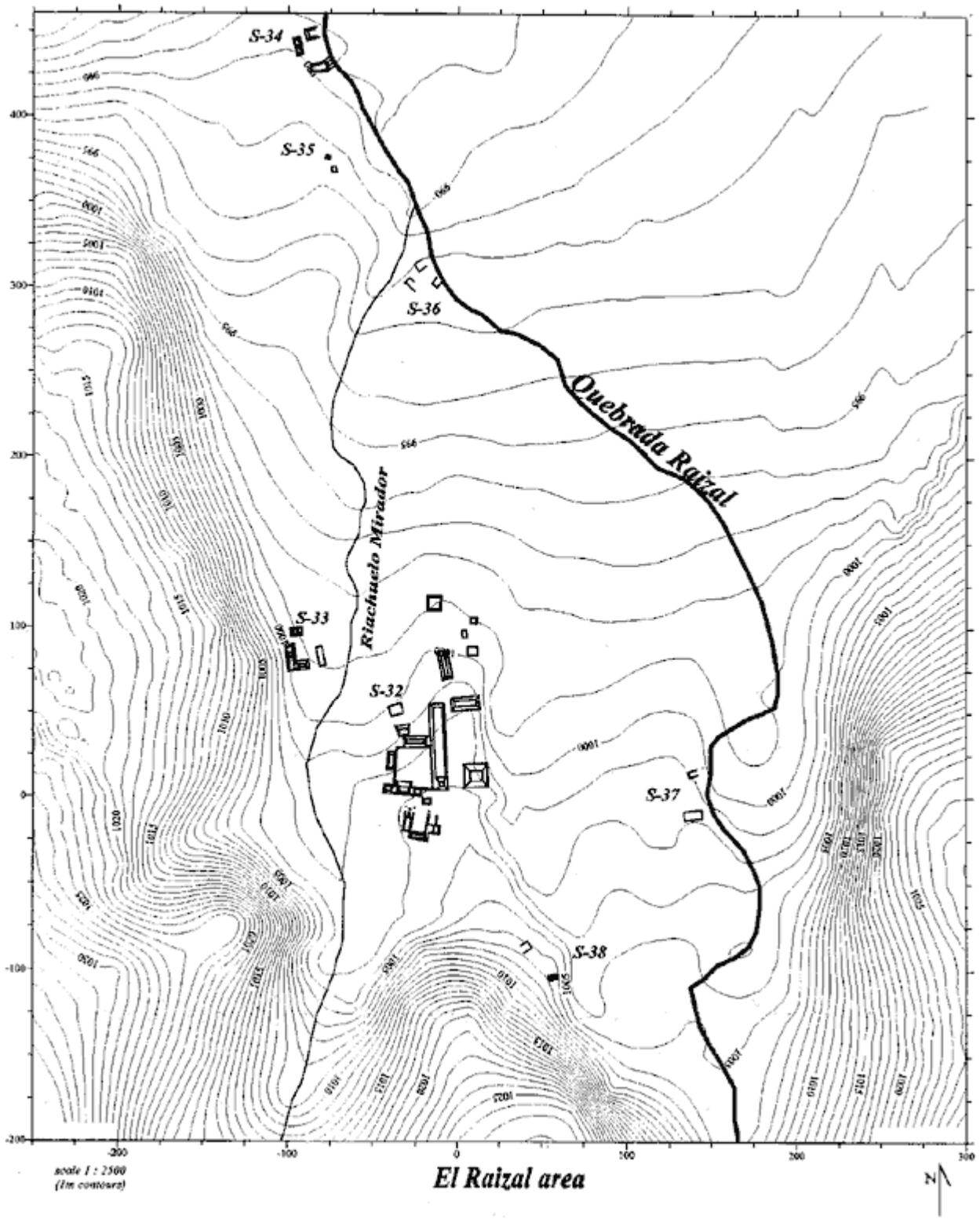

Figure 3: El Raizal Area.

Objectives

The season's objectives were four-fold:

1. Undertake a survey of the area around the site of El Raizal;

   The site is located within a small, rather narrow valley that opens into the larger Río Amarillo valley. The area for survey thus comprised all the area within the Quebrada Raizal valley up to but not including all Río Amarillo valley area. The slopes of the hills surrounding the Quebrada Raizal valley were also surveyed.

2. Complete mapping of topography and of archaeological remains within the area surveyed;

   The RARS project, once having completed the first objective, was to use a Topcon Electronic Distance Measuring machine (EDM) to make a complete topographic map of the surveyed region. All the archaeological sites (residences, artifact scatters, terraces, etc.) located in the survey were to be mapped completely.

3. Extensive excavation at the primary site of the region, El Raizal;

   With the completion of the mapping, and the production of an accurate map of the site of El Raizal, an extensive excavation of the main structures of the site was to be undertaken. Some of the excavation would be test-units, while others would be meant to be true vertical chronological probes, and yet others would be extensive horizontal exposures of specific features.

4. Test excavations at some of the outlying sites;

   With the partial establishment of a comparative database of artifacts recovered from the excavation of El Raizal, smaller test-excavations were to be undertaken at whatever sites located and mapped in the previous phases of the season.

Project Team

The project consisted of 15 individuals: A principle investigator (Marcello-Andrea Canuto); a second investigator (William F. McFarlane); 5 Honduran excavators; 6 Honduran excavation helpers; 1 draughtsman; and 1 driver.

Survey and Mapping of the El Raizal Region

(Figure 3)

Number of sites

The area completely surveyed and mapped was relatively small. Although it did represent almost the whole of the small valley of the Quebrada Raizal, the total area covered by the survey was 0.4 km2. Within this area, 8 distinct archaeological sites (S-32, S-33, S-34, S-35, S-36, S-37, S-38, S-44) were located, totaling 37 mounds for the whole surveyed area—or, a ca. 100 mounds/km^2. While this number is much lower than those of the Copán valley (cf. Fash 1983), it is somewhat higher than the 60 mounds/km^2 seen in other rural areas. This difference might not represent a generally higher ancient settlement concentration in the El Raizal area, but rather it might result from the fact that the surveyed area around El Raizal is so much smaller that that of other rural centers. Around other rural centers, the survey regions are larger (Los Achiotes 1.2 km^2, Río Amarillo 3 km^2) and therefore include much more empty space around the rural center. In the case of El Raizal, only 0.4 km^2 was surveyed – the immediate area around the rural center. Future research will rectify this imbalance by expanding the area surveyed around El Raizal to be equivalent to that of other sites of the rural region.

Location of sites

The area surveyed contains three distinct topographic zones – floodplain, valley terraces, hill-slopes. The sites in this region are not located in these three distinct regions equally. In fact, there appears to be very little evidence of sites on the hill-slopes or hilltops. A single artifact scatter on a hill slope did indicate the presence of at least one site on a hilltop to the south of the main site. All other sites are either on the valley terraces or on the floodplain – some sites are located along the river.

Typology of sites

To record morphological variability among mound groups, the survey employs a modified version of the typology originally developed for the Copán Valley survey (Willey and Leventhal 1979) and then amplified for the Copán Rural area surveys (Webster 1985). In all, this typology contains 8 types formalized according to a hierarchy of the following characteristics: (1) number of mounds in the group, (2) presence or absence of a formal patio area, (3) size and volume of the main mound, (4) presence or absence of formal architectural elements (Canuto 1996). The typology is as follows:

NM non-mound artifact concentration
SM single mound

AM 2-4 mounds, no platform, informal organization
AMP 2-4 mounds, platform, formal patio, <1m high mound
I 2-6 mounds, platform, formal patio, <1m high mound, cut stone
II 6-20 mounds, platform, <3 formal patios, 1-3m high mound, cut stone
III 6-20 mounds, <4 platforms, <5 formal patios, 3-5m high mound, cut/vaulted stone
IV 20-100 mounds, 4+ platforms, 5+ patios, 5m high mound, cut/vaulted/sculpted stones

Although each criterion helps identify the social unit that the mound group represents materially, the *number of mounds* and the number of patios are the more important criteria.

The 8 sites encountered and mapped this season belong to three of the eight distinct typological categories. There is one *type III* site, four *type I* sites, and three *type AM* sites. There exists a general discontinuity in the range of settlement types given the scarcity of Type II and III sites and the abundance of the smaller site types. The relative abundance of simpler site types and a scarcity of *types II-IV* sites is typical in the rural region. The few large type III/IV sites of the rural region are more than the conglomeration of multiple smaller social units. They may in fact represent a different type of social unit that functioned as the integrative locus of the regional economic and political system.

Morphology of sites

Eight distinct sites were located in the area surveyed and mapped. A very cursory description of each site is provided (Figure 3 and Figure 4 for maps of the following sites; see Appendix A for detailed survey information on the following sites).

S-32 (type III)

Known as El Raizal, it is a large type III site (Figure 4). It is located in a small southern arm of the Río Amarillo valley. Roughly 150m W of the site runs a small creek called the Raizal Quebrada. To the W and S the foothills surround the site. To the N, this small side valley opens up into the larger Río Amarillo valley. The site is located along a 1-2m rise on the valley floor that would have provided it good protection from flooding. Plenty of good cultivable land surrounds the site.

The site consists of 18 distinct structures organized into roughly 4 patios. The site is bisected by a long range structure (ca. 50m), with a small structure on its southern end (M8). The southern half of the range structure and three mounds to the west (M5, 6, 7) constitute a sunken patio (P1). The same range structure and two mounds to the east (M9, 10) establish a second patio (P2).

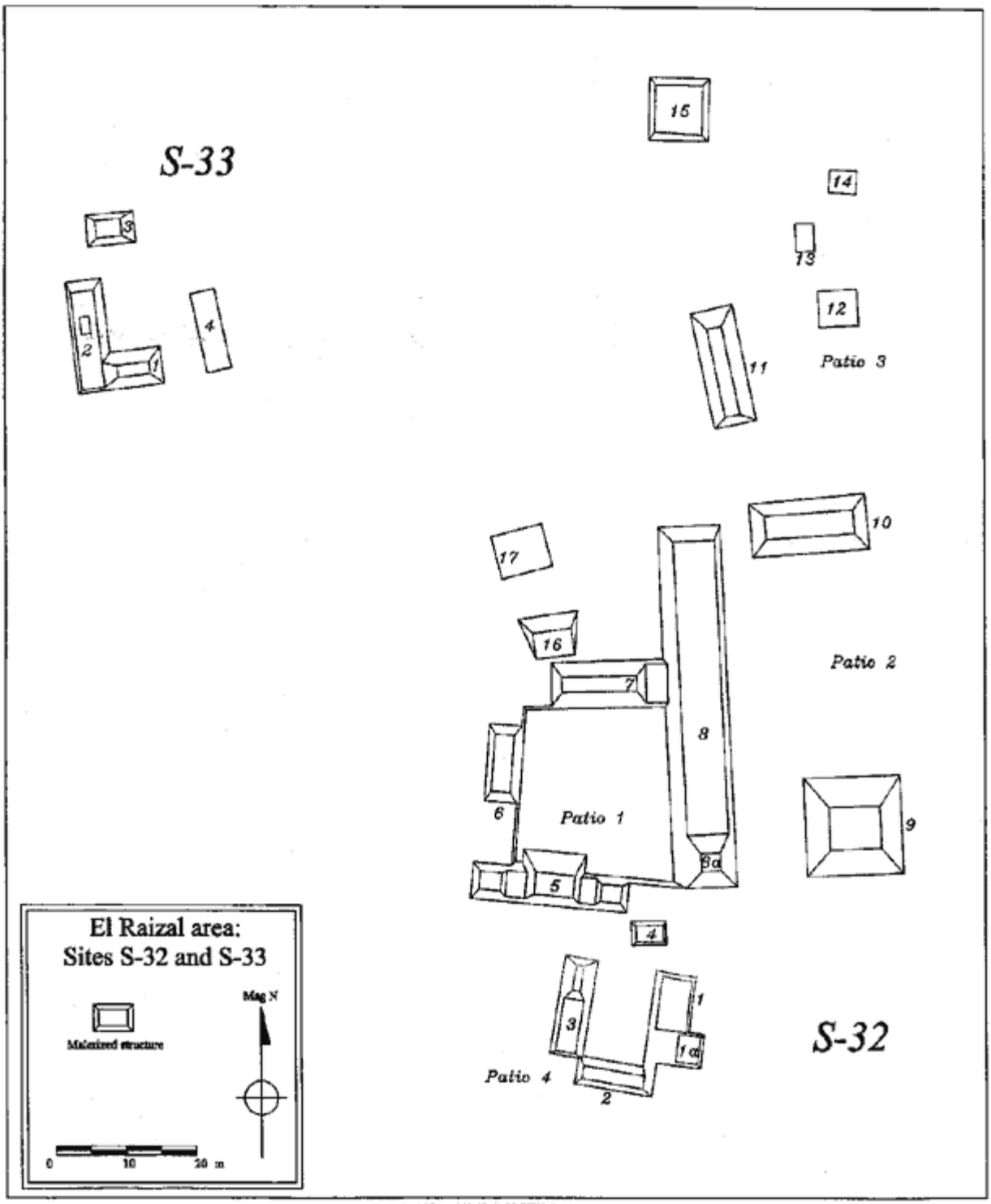

Figure 4: El Raizal Area: Sites S-32 and S-33.

Patio 1 is a large sunken patio (ca. 20×20m). Its southern mound (M5) is a winged structure, with the central portion rising roughly 2m. The northern building (M7) abuts

the range structure (M8), while the W structure – M6 – is free standing. The central patio area appears to have no structures. To the N of M7, there are 2 other small mounds that appear ancillary to P1 and have thus been preliminarily associated with this patio group. The southern of the two mounds abuts the "back" of M7, while the northern mound is located roughly 7m to the N. There may have been a small mound to the W to create a "sub-patio" but little was in evidence on the surface.

Patio 2 consists of the full length of M8 to the west, M9 (the largest structure of the site) to the south, and a relatively long northern structure (M10). Patio 2 is delimited to the east by a 1.5m drop in the terrain. The natural terrace upon which the whole site is constructed acts as the eastern limit of this patio. M9 rises roughly 3.5m – and most likely represents the ceremonial fulcrum of the site. Little evidence of cut stones suggests that this structure may – notwithstanding its height – be entirely of cobble-masonry. M10 is another cobble construction that runs from the northern edge of M8 to the eastern terrace cut. This patio measures 35×20m.

To the S of P1, there is another patio group (P4). This group has been partially damaged by the modern road that passes through the S part of the site. It consists of 3 main structures, and may have had a 4th that was destroyed by the road cut. This patio is smaller than that of P1, and appears to be completely of cobble construction. The patio measures roughly 10×10m.

To the N of M10, there are 5 other mounds that have been informally clustered into another patio group (P3). The specific relationship of these 5 mounds remains, however, very tenuous. Specifically M11 and M15 appear to be separate and "unattached" mounds. M12, 13, 14 are three small cobble mounds that clearly constitute a small patio group to the N of M10. M11 is oriented N/S, and appears to be a cobble-construction enigmatically placed in this area of the site. M15 is also a unique mound. It consists of very large boulders that have been partly faced. It does not represent a regular platform. It may have a non-residential function.

S-33 (type I)

Small domestic patio group ca. 150m NW of El Raizal (Figure 4). The site is located on the edge of the valley floor – just at the foot of the hills surrounding the area. The area is well drained, and in the area between El Raizal (S-32) and this site, runs a small drainage brook. The site has also been somewhat altered by the construction of the modern road. This site was test excavated by W. McFarlane in 1998.

This site consists of 4 mounds arranged in an informal patio group. The S and W mounds connect to form a single L-shaped platform, while the N and E structures are free-standing. The L-shaped platform appears to be the highest structure. The patio area appears not to be sunken like those of the main site. The structures appear to be constructed of cobblestone with little evidence of cut-stone masonry. The superstructures of these mounds were probably constructed of perishable material.

S-34 (type I)

Small domestic patio group located ca. 350m N of El Raizal (S-32). The site is located on the edge of the floodplain, along the Quebrada Raizal. The area is well-drained although it is on terrain roughly 10m below that of S-32. The site has also been somewhat destroyed by modern construction and natural erosion. The eastern section of patio was cut off by the Quebrada Raizal's course, which may have been altered by modern day routing of the creek into sluices and canals for a modern pisciculture farm.

The site consists of three cobble construction structures. The N and S mounds are cut by the creek, while the W mound seems intact. The W and S mounds have small platforms extending from the main super-structure bearing platform. The patio they encompass is roughly 15m×15m. The river probably destroyed a small E structure that would have closed off the patio. In size and scale this site is very similar to S-33.

S-35 (type AM)

Small dual-mound group, ca. 300m N of El Raizal (S-32). This site is located on the valley floor, roughly 30m W of the Quebrada. It appears as if modern plowing has almost completely destroyed the group. There are many cobbles strewn about the area, and the mounds are rather flat and amorphous. From preliminary observation, it appears as a small cobble-masonry, dual-mound group, with perishable superstructures.

S-36 (type AM)

Small patio group of 3 mounds, located ca. 275m N of El Raizal. This small domestic patio group is located on the edge of the floodplain, along the bank of the Quebrada Raizal. The area is well drained although it is on terrain roughly 10m below that of S-32. The site has been somewhat destroyed by natural erosion. The eastern section of patio was cut off by the Quebrada Raizal's course.

The mounds are very low cobble-masonry structures. They outline a small 7×7m patio. Artifact collection was undertaken along the cut of the Quebrada. Artifacts were located not only in the cut portion of the structures, but also around the area, suggesting midden deposits nearby. Copador ceramics were found within this collection.

S-37 (type AM)

A very badly destroyed dual mound group located roughly 150m E of S-32, near the creek's edge. It appears as if the group has been destroyed by modern plowing. There are many cobbles strewn about the area, and the mounds are rather flat and amorphous. Moreover, some of the cobbles have been collected and piled up. From preliminary observation, it appears as a small cobble-masonry, dual-mound group, with perishable superstructures.

S-38 (type I)

Small dual mound group greatly damaged by the modern road from the highway. Located roughly 150m S of El Raizal (S-32), these two mounds are located along the same first terrace on which S-32 is located. From preliminary observation, it appears as a small cobble-masonry, dual-mound group, with perishable superstructures. There may have been more mounds to the SW, but the modern road constructions in this area would have completely destroyed them.

S-44 (type AM)

This site is a small domestic group ca. 200m S of El Raizal. One of few sites located on the hilltop surrounding S-32. Survey of the area just below it found a very extensive sheet midden of artifact. Among them, a spent obsidian core was recovered – evidence for local obsidian blade production.

Chronology of sites

The survey of the area recovered very few artifacts. However, from the morphology of the distinct sites and the architectural style, the initial survey hypothesis was that of a Late Classic (A.D. 700-900) time frame. The few surface artifacts recovered supported this hypothesis. Copador ceramics were collected in association with S-35, while a prismatic blade core was found around S-44.

These preliminary findings would have to be complemented with excavation to confirm their accuracy and to determine the full breadth of the sites' occupational spans.

Excavation of S-32, El Raizal (Objective 3)

Introduction

What follows is a summary of the excavations at S-32 (Figure 5 and Figure 6). While not every single detail of provenience and procedure is related here, there follows a detailed description of the final results of each sub-operation undertaken in 1998. Apart from the descriptions of the various off-architecture excavations, the majority of the information presented here relates to the architectural sequences of the various structures investigated. The subsequent discussion will use a specific set of designations to describe the architecture of the site:

> *mound/structure* - that which appears on the surface as a single architectural construction
>
> *platform* - the substructure that provides the architectural surface for another building

sub-platform - the substructure that provides the architectural surface for platforms

superstructure - any building built on top of a platform

surface - any stratum that appears to be prepared for use as a floor

floor - any surface that has been prepared with cobbles or plaster

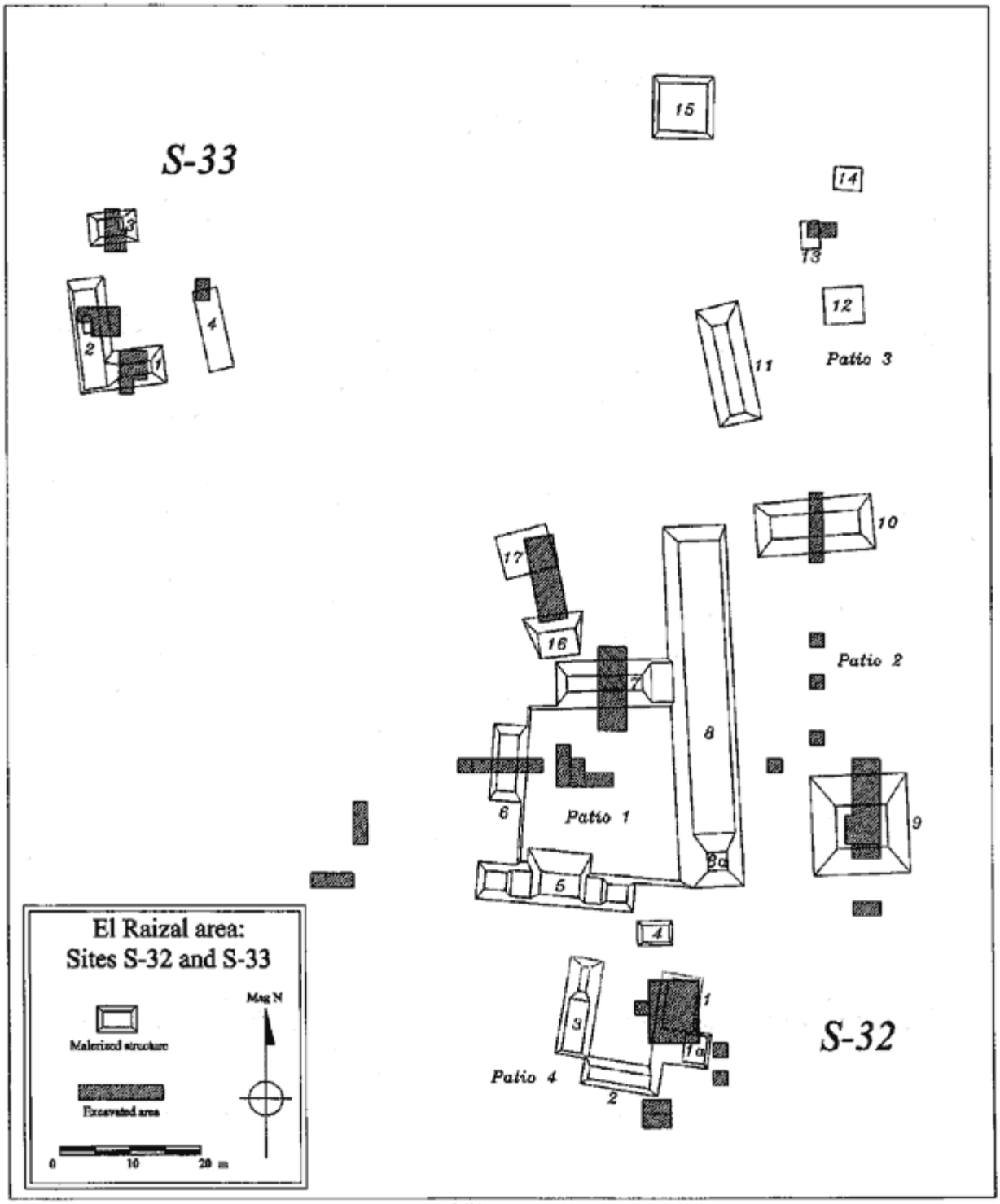

Figure 5: El Raizal area: Sites S-32 and S-33.

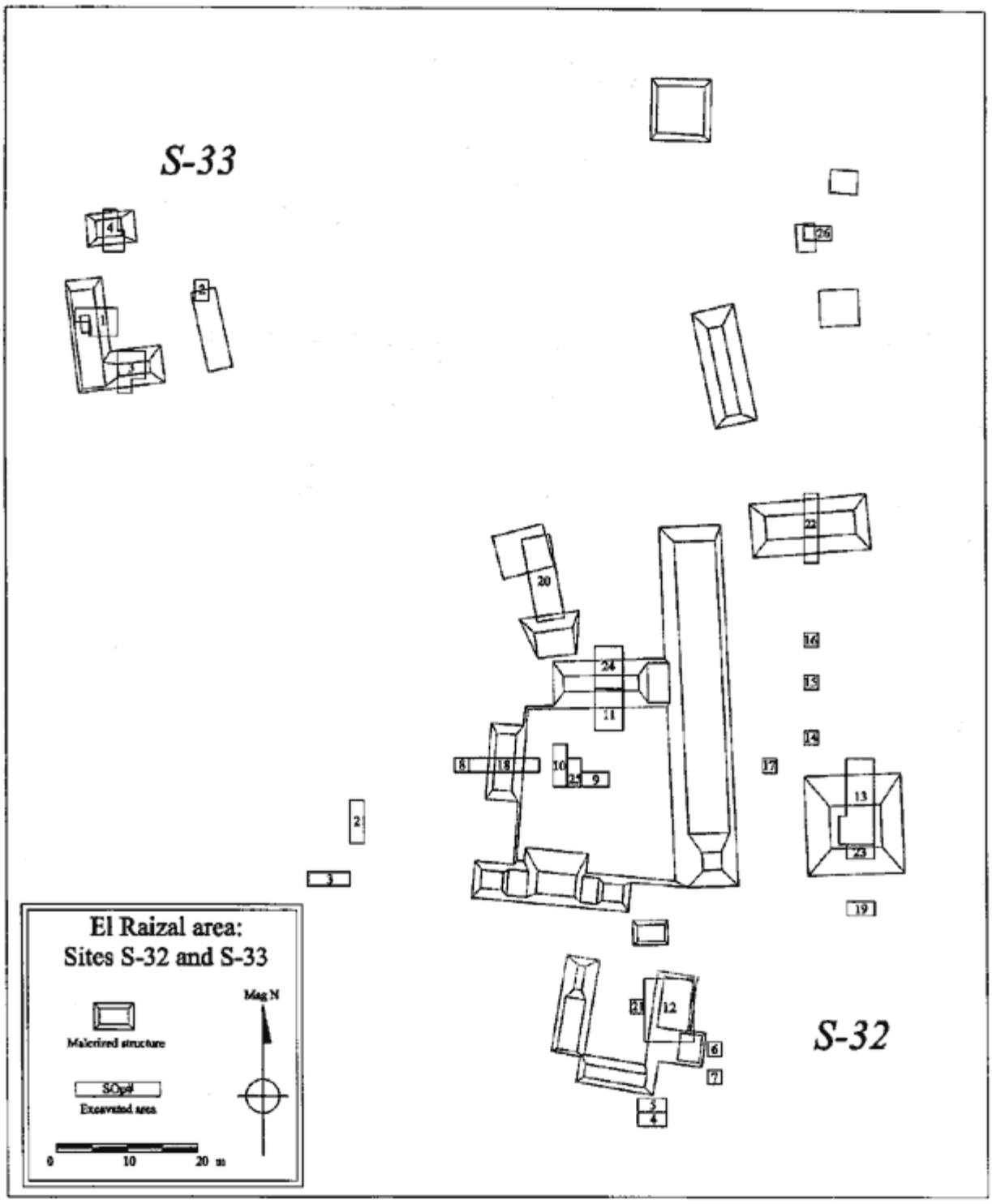

Figure 6: El Raizal area: Sites S-32 and S-33.

The artifactual analysis from these excavations remains largely undone, there was a relatively concerted effort at preliminary in-field identification of ceramics. Hence, the

descriptions of the architecture that follow will be peppered with references to the general character of the associated ceramics. The chronological sequence adopted by this research derives from Cassandra Bill's work (1997) which in turn relied heavily upon Viel (1993) and Willey et al. (1994). Moreover, artifacts of special note (ceramic and other) are also mentioned. However, the main goal of this report is to describe the basic empirical findings of this past season – the majority of which relate directly to the architecture of the site.

In general, the excavations at S-32 had a series of distinct goals:

1. Develop a chronology for the site. While ostensibly Late Classic in form and style, the origins of S-32's were unknown. More specifically, chronological information on the length of occupation at each tested structure, as reflected in associated refuse material and architectural fill, would help detail the population history of the rural area.

2. Analyze the architecture of the different structures to examine the variations found among the different architectural groups within the site. This study would help determine the nature of socio-economic variability among ancient rural households.

3. Investigate activities associated with each structure in order to elucidate the functional and behavioral differences between distinct domestic groups.

After each section, preliminary conclusions are presented. More definitive statements will have to await the completion of laboratory analysis to be undertaken in the 1999 season. The extent to which the excavation goals were realized will be discussed in a conclusion of this whole section. More general conclusions pertaining to all the work completed in the 1998 season will be reserved for a final summary section.

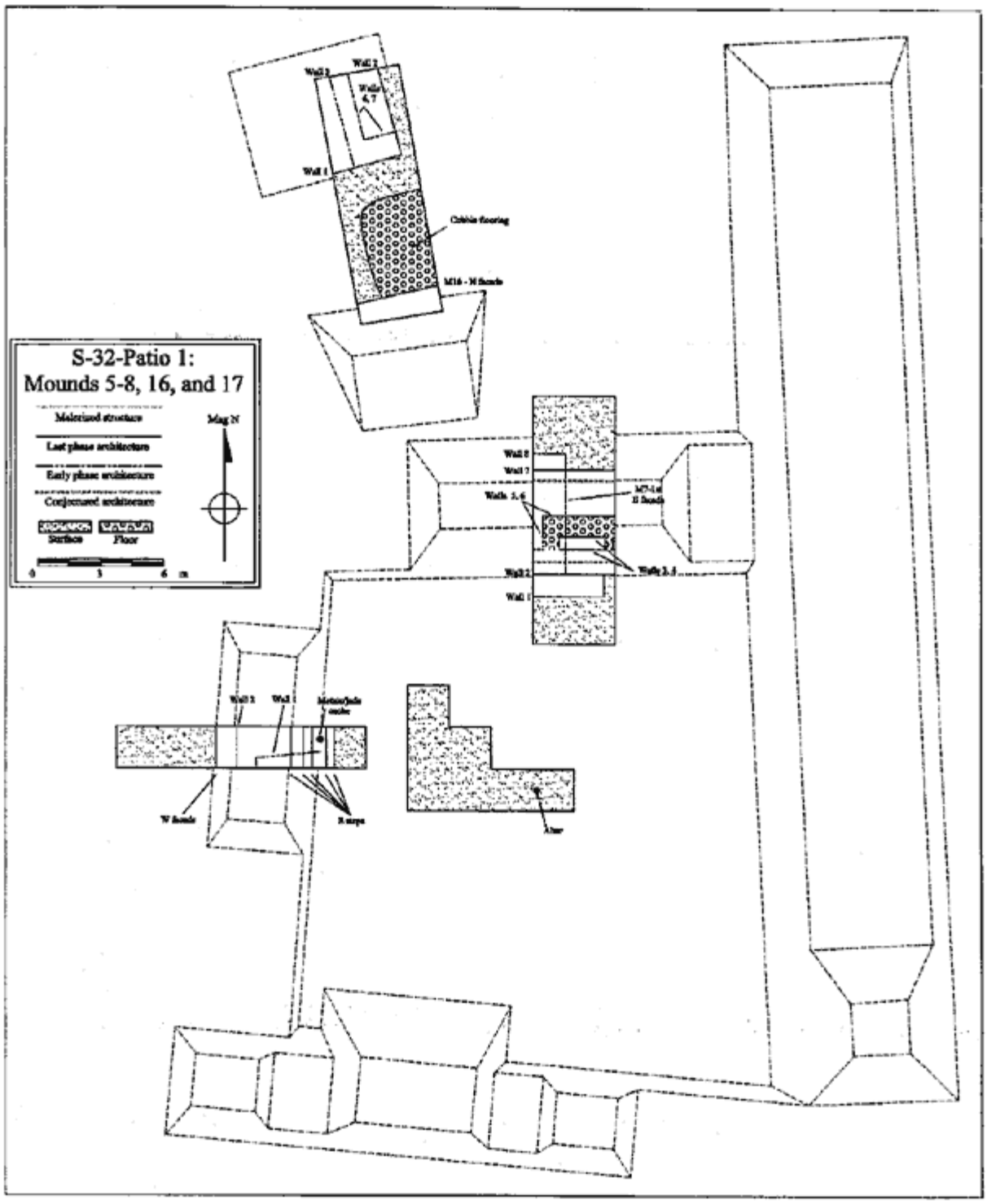

Figure 7: S-32, Patio 1, Mounds 5-8, 16 & 17.

Excavations of S-32, Patio 1

(Figure 7)

Main patio: Sub-Op. 9, 10, 25

These three contiguous sub-operations were placed within Patio of S-32. They were located along the center lines of M6 and M7 in order to (1) investigate the nature of the patio surface, (2) ascertain how many construction phases might be found, and (3) determine whether any feature might be found along these center lines of these two structures – especially near or at the hypothesized intersection of the center axes of both M6 and M7.

Excavation in SOp9 revealed at a depth of 10cm and at the coordinates N19/E-26 a rounded stone measuring roughly 50cm in diameter. While somewhat rustic, this stone's shape is not natural but rather worked. Moreover, below this rounded stone, a cluster of 13 obsidian blades – some measuring ca. 13cm in length – was located. This association of a worked stone with an obsidian cache suggests the intentional placement of these components. This altar's location also appears to be at the intersection of the central axes of both M6 and M7. Upon removal of this rounded stone and its subjacent obsidian cache, excavation proceeded to search for a patio surface. Excavation continued for another 20cm during which no evidence of a formal prepared surface was encountered.

Excavation commenced in SOp10 and SOp25 to expose other areas of Patio 1 with the possibility that a patio surface in SOp9 would have been eroded. Excavation of the first 25cm revealed only a mixing of modern artifacts with a loose grayish loamy soil. Upon the removal of this topsoil, a more compact orange-brown layer was revealed at elevation 1000.70m. This layer coincided with the layer that was located under the rounded stone of SOp9 as well. This compact soil may represent the original surface of Patio 1 – a compact natural layer that showed no signs of formal surfacing or preparation.

A small 1×1m probe in the SE corner of SOp10 was then undertaken to reveal the sub-surface stratigraphy of Patio 1. The compact sandy orange-brown layer was found to be ca. 65cm thick. Below this layer, a pebbly sandy layer was revealed which was clearly a natural sedimentary stratum. This layer was 35cm thick, under which a dark humid brown clayey level was revealed. Excavation was terminated at 999.50m.

Mound 6: Sub-Op. 8, 18

These two sub-operations were excavated in order to (1) determine the nature of rural elite residential architecture, (2) resolve the chronological depth of this structure and group through off-architecture excavation, (3) ascertain the forms of previous constructions as determined by the probe excavations within the architecture. M6 was excavated in two different excavation units: SOp8 and SOp18. SOp8 was a 2×2m unit (NW: N22/E-46) to the west (behind) M6. SOp18 was a 2×10m (N22 to N22 and E-44 to E-34) trench that spanned the full breadth of the structure on its central axis.

SOp8: This unit was located behind M6 in order to avoid architecture and reveal the nature of a potential midden deposit. Excavation proceeded roughly 1.10m below the surface and revealed multiple artifact-rich layers. A stratum of roughly 60cm (from 1001.20m to 1000.60m) contained many artifacts (mostly ceramics and lithics). In-field identification of the ceramics suggested that this lot was mostly early Coner, although some earlier ceramics were also recovered. Below this artifact-rich stratum, a 40cm thick, sandier lighter brown layer contained very few artifacts. However, upon complete removal of this layer, a semi-circular cobble-ringed feature was revealed within which several Usulután (Late Preclassic/Protoclassic) ceramics were located. The soil with this circular feature was a darker more organic color. This feature was surrounded by a sterile soil layer at an elevation of 1000.30m.

Given the results from SOp8, excavation of M6 itself involved not only a careful exposure of the structure but also a search for more clues on the nature of the Late Preclassic deposit located within a sterile layer roughly 1m below the surface.

SOp18: This unit was a 2×10m trench along the center axis of M6. The initial phase of excavation exposed a cobble-masonry structure, roughly 1.2m high, measured from the patio surface.

On its eastern side there were 5 rough steps leading from the Patio 1 surface to the summit of the mound. The excavation trench was too narrow to determine the width of this central stairway. At the summit, recessed roughly 1m west from the edge of the highest step, a 2-coursed cobble wall running N/S was exposed that may represent the foundation wall of the superstructure's front (patio-facing, eastern facade) wall. The superstructure was most probably primarily constructed with perishable materials. No such rear wall was encountered. On either side of this possible superstructure wall, the platform surface was prepared with small flat cobblestones. The whole platform summit (at elevation 1002.50m) measured 3m in width. The back facade (the west side) consisted of a simple two-terrace back wall. The first terrace was a 3-coursed cobble wall descending 30cm from the platform summit. The second terrace consisted of a 5-course cobble wall descending another 70cm to an earthen surface. The surface upon which the back wall rested was at a higher elevation than the surface upon which the lowest step of the front facade rested – hence, the sunken nature of the patio.

Upon exposing the stairs, platform, and superstructure of M6, excavation proceeded to remove the stairway, and then a careful excavation of the fill of the construction. This excavation was intended to locate earlier phases of construction – especially in light of the Late Preclassic ceramics found ca. 6m to the west. Excavation first progressed with the removal of the stairs on the eastern side of M6. The fill was filled with smaller cobbles and a dry loose earth. The fill contained many artifacts – its ceramics, from only an in-field inspection, appeared to be mainly early Coner. This chronological evidence accorded well with the artifacts from SOp8. At an elevation of ca. 1001.00m (1.5m below the summit of the platform), along the central axis of M6, at N21.5/E-37 (below the 3rd step of the eastern stairs) a large overturned metate fragment was encountered surrounded by small cobbles. Excavation of this feature removed the metate and recovered below it, a small 4×3×1cm jade pendant with the image of a human face

carved on one side. This cache appears to have been laid prior to the construction of the latest version of M6.

At this same elevation of 1001.00m, evidence of earlier construction **not** related to the later architecture was encountered. A rough 3-coursed cobble wall (W1), **perpendicular** to the Late Classic platform and superstructure was also found. In fact, the metate-jade feature was located at roughly the same elevation as the top courses of W1, 40cm to the north. W1 ran roughly E/W, and the excavation of the fill from the stairs had revealed only a portion of it – it clearly extended farther W, further underneath the Late Classic platform.

Excavation of the rest of the fill covering W1 revealed the continuation of W1 another meter to the west. Furthermore, another cobble wall (W2) running N/S at roughly the same elevation as W1 (1000.80m) was also uncovered ca. 50cm to the west of W1. W1 and W2 did not join. The area in-between W1 and W2 was covered with a layer of ceramics broken in-situ. Acting as a layer in-between the top of Walls 1/2 and the fill of the Late Classic platform, this layer of ceramics was strewn both to the east and west of W2. The ceramics constituted large fragments of vessels, although no complete vessel was encountered. These were early Coner ceramics like those of the fill directly above them. Excavation removed all the soil above and around W1 and W2 to expose the layer upon which they were constructed: a dark carbon-filled compact layer filled with early sherds – possibly from the Early Classic. This dark soil stratum thins and disappears farther west – in SOp8 it was completely missing. In fact, the dark soil from the stratum below W1 and W2 is identical to that found within the pit from SOp8. This continuity suggests a stratigraphic link between the Late Preclassic sherds from SOp8's pit feature and the construction of W1 and W2. Below this dark soil, the sterile soil in which the semi-circular feature from SOp8 was located.

Mound 7: Sub-Op. 11, 24

These two sub-operations were excavated in order to (1) determine the nature of rural elite residential architecture, (2) ascertain the forms of previous constructions as determined by the probe excavations within the architecture.

SOp11: Excavation in SOp11 began with the southern facade of M7 – the side facing Patio 1. Excavation opened an 8×4m trench (N26 to N32, E-26 to E-22) along what was calculated to be the central axis of M7. In the very first stratum of topsoil, multiple scattered artifacts and cobbles were revealed. Among these cobbles – part of the architecture fall of the superstructure, a tanged lithic lance point (13×4×.25cm) was recovered.

At roughly the N28, a cut-stone wall (W1) was revealed – the first example of cut-stone architecture encountered at the site. In addition another wall – this of cobblestones (W2) was revealed at N29 running across the full 4m width of the excavation unit. W1 was revealed to be a 2-coursed bench that measured ca. 1m in width, with a corner at the coordinate point N28/E-23 and an eastern facade abutting W2 – the front (southern) facade of M7. The western facade of the bench was not encountered as the excavation

to the west was not amplified beyond the E-26 gridline. The walls of the bench were cleared down to layer upon which they rested – the architecturally defined level of Patio 1. No evidence of an apron-flooring was encountered at the base of either W1 or W2. The bench and M7's southern facade rested on a compact surface at elevation 1000.80m – this elevation roughly coincides with the 1000.70m elevation for the compact surface theorized to be the original patio surface in SOp9, 10, and 25.

Because the southern facade of M7 (W2; N29 gridline) extended throughout the whole 4m width of the unit, it was clear that it preceded the bench that abutted it at point N29/E-22.5. This wall was relatively well-preserved except in the area to the east of the Wall abutment, where W2 suffered major collapse probably because the bench was not there to support the lower courses of W2. The top of W2 and its related terrace are roughly at elevation 1001.50m.

At N30.5 another cobble wall – W3 – was encountered resting on an elevation of 1002.1m. W3 was very different from W2 because it consisted of only three rows of very small cobbles. Excavation also found at N31 another cobble wall – W4 – that was similar in construction to W3. However, W4 faced north while W3 faced south. Moreover, also became evident that both W3 and W4 did not extend across the whole width of the unit like W2. In fact they both ended at E-24.5 on one end and E-22.5 on the other end. It became clear that W3 and W4 represented the two faces of a single 0.5m thick wall that functioned as the basal wall of the superstructure's southern, patio-facing facade. In fact, at E-22, roughly 10cm from the eastern limit of the excavation unit, another set of identical cobble walls were revealed. The space in-between the eastern end of W3-4 at E-22.5 and the new wall beginning at E-22 was surfaced with a single large flag-stone suggesting that the intervening space represented a 0.5m wide entryway. W3-4 terminated to the west at E-24.5, yet there was no evidence of another wall to west of this termination. Although no other wall was found, this was a second entrance into the superstructure.

Throughout the excavations, the area between the top of W2 (N29.4) and the bottom of W3 (N30.5) remained equivocal. This was an area whose elevation rose 60cm in a rough cobble-strewn slope. In this 1.1m wide area (N29.4 to N30.5) there could have been a terrace surface that led from the top of W2 to an intervening step which in turn would have given access to the entryways encountered at the eastern and western ends of W3-4. Only rubble fill was encountered however.

To the north of W3-4, a surface paved with small flat cobbles was found at elevation 1002.6m. This surface extended from the eastern limit of the excavations all the across to E-25.5 where another small cobble wall – W5 – similar to those of W3-4 was encountered running north/south. This wall extends from N31 – flush with the inner facade of W3-4 – northward to N32, where it corners with another cobble wall – W6 – that extends eastward to the limit of the excavation unit. These two walls represent single inner-room wall – perhaps the outline of a bench that would extend back to the back wall of the superstructure. The area between W3-4 and the inner-room wall is all paved with flat cobblestones.

Apart from the morphology of M7, excavations in SOp11 also revealed multiple phases of construction that were analyzed more specifically in SOp24. However, the initial indication that M7 represented at least 3 phases of construction will be first described from the evidence in SOp11. The first piece of evidence came from the detailed analysis of W2 showing that this architectural feature was constructed in two distinct phases. At roughly gridline E-24.5, the cobble courses of W2 all align vertically – as if W2 first cornered to the north but was later extended. The second piece of evidence came from the surfacing of the superstructure room. The elevation of the room to the east of the E-24.5 gridline was slightly lower than the elevation of the room floor to the west of E-24.5 – as if the structure to the east of the gridline was made from different fill than that west of the gridline. Both these pieces of evidence suggested that (1) in M6's first phase, W2 originally cornered with the platform's original western facade at E-24.5, and that (2) in M6's second phase, the platform was enlarged to the east with an extension of W2 that terminated as an abutment to M8 to the east. Furthermore, the excavated superstructure probably abuts (at E-25.5) another superstructure to the west. Finally, the cut-stone bench represents a final phase of construction since it abuts both the original and extended sections of W2.

SOp24: Excavation on M7 continued on the northern side in another 6×4m trench (N38 to N32, and E-26 to E-22). Excavation on this side was able to determine much more specifically the phases of construction associated with M6. After careful stratigraphic analysis, 4 distinct phases of construction were identified.

Excavation to the N of M6 aimed first to identify the back (northern) facade of the platform – it was identified almost immediate running east west at gridline N34.5. This wall – W7 – was made of medium sized cobbles and began at elevation 1002.00m. As excavation progressed, it became clear that this back facade had experienced a great deal of lateral pressure, since it was leaning northward quite steeply – almost as if the fill from within was pushing the top of the wall outward. Moreover, this wall exhibited several patterns in its construction that mirrored those found in W2 – the front facade of M7. Just as in W2, at the gridline E-24.5, W7 exhibited the same vertical alignment of cobbles, suggesting that W7 first cornered at E-24.5 and then was later extended eastward. It also became clear, that the top four courses of W7 (11 courses in total) did not have this same alignment of cobbles at E-24.5 – this fact suggests that the top 4 courses were added after the construction of W7's extension. Furthermore, the superstructure room excavated in SOp11 stratigraphically associates with these top 4 courses. Therefore, between the first version of M7 and the superstructure room of SOp11 there should be an intervening phase.

To the north of W7, at an elevation of 1001.50m, two notable features were revealed: (1) in the eastern half of the unit, a huge boulder measuring ca. 0.5m in height abutting W7 to the north, and (2) in the western end of the unit, a cobble surface extending from W7 farther north to gridline N35.2. At first this cobble surface appeared to be an apron flooring, but more excavation proved that the N35.2 limit of this surface was a another cobble wall 50cm high – W8. W8 rested on the same compact earthen surface on which the boulder rested – at elevation 1001.0m. Thus the cobble surface and W8 were recognized to be a terrace that extended northward from W7. W8 did not however run

the full east-west course of the unit; it terminated at E-24.30. Curiously, however, the N35.2/E-24.30 coordinate for the termination of W8 was not a corner of the terrace. In fact, it appeared as if the terrace's eastern facade had been demolished in antiquity. It is possible that the original corner of this lower terrace was at this coordinate but that at a later date this eastern facade was torn away perhaps in order to extend the terrace eastward to abut the boulder.

After revealing the northern facade of M7, excavation confirmed that M7 had been constructed in multiple phases. However, in resolving that question, this excavation posed more specific stratigraphic queries that needed further probing: (1) the W8 neither extended across the whole of the excavation unit nor cornered southward, (2) W8 rested upon elevation 1001.0m and the northern terrace did not extend under W7's eastern extension, yet the first course of W7's eastern extension rested on rubble-fill at elevation 1001.5m, and (3) the ambiguous relationship between the eastward extension of W7 and the addition of four stone courses to the W7 wall. To determine how these issues could be resolved, and therefore detail more specifically M7's original form and how it was subsequently enlarged, a 2×2m probe was excavated from the summit of M7 to the south of W7 and to the east of M7's original eastern facade. This probe would reveal the various phases that involved the construction of the two extensions to W7, as well as expose M7's original eastern facade.

Excavation began at elevation 1002.45m, excavating first roughly 45cm of fill pertaining to the second amplification of W7. This excavation reached, at elevation 1002.1m, a rough cobble surface. It appeared that this find answered query #3. The prepared surface at elevation 1002.1m proved that the extension upward of W7 was a distinct event occurring after the eastward extension of W7. If the two had been concurrent, there would not have been a prepared surface that coincided with the original top of W7. This find showed that the 4-course addition to W7 and the superstructure room of SOp11 belonged to a third phase of construction distinct from the second which involved only the extension eastward of M7.

Excavation progressed below this prepared surface for 20cm. It first revealed the top courses of M7's well-preserved original eastern facade. Moreover, at elevation 1001.90m, excavation also revealed a bench structure abutting M7-1st's eastern facade. This bench rested on another prepared surface at elevation 1001.60m. Clearly, excavation had shown that phase 2 – the eastern extension of M7 – could be divided in two sub-phases. Phase 2A involved the extension of M7 eastward through the construction of a lower platform with a superstructure abutting eastern facade of M7-1st. Phase 2B involved the burial of this superstructure and the raising of the extension platform to be flush with the top of M7-1st.

Excavation then removed the bench and the surface upon which it rested at 1001.6m. Excavation revealed at 1001.1m the final course of M7-1st's eastern facade and an apron flooring consisting of small pebbles. Moreover, at elevation 1001.5m, the eastern facade of wall of M7-1st exhibited a 20cm protrusion of its facade – like a small lip terrace. In this way, the lower portion of the eastern terrace extended to E-24.30 (instead of E-24.50 of the upper half). This small lip terrace coincided precisely with the

eastern extent of W8 that terminated at coordinate N35.2/E-24.30. This coincidence may help resolve query #1. It appears that W8 did corner at N35.2/E-24.30; however, to the north of W7, this eastern facade was demolished and reused, while to the south of W7, the facade was simply buried. Moreover, the fact that W7's extension eastward rested on fill and not on a surface – query #2 – is also explained. A portion of the M7-1st eastern facade was torn way, and those stones were used to extend W8 (terrace's northern facade) eastward probably to abut with the boulder. Earth was then added behind this extension in order to make it flush with the top of the terrace – 1001.6m. This earth was then compacted, serving as the surface on which the first courses of W7's eastern extension were laid.

Excavation of the rear of M7 revealed that the structure was the result of 4 distinct phases of construction – M7-1st, an extension eastward (with 2 sub-phases), a raising of the whole platform and construction of the room of SOp11, and finally the addition of a cut-stone bench along the southern facade. These additions, amplifications, and modifications are substantial and suggest a relatively long sequence of usage. In fact, excavation below the apron flooring of M7-1st's eastern facade recovered ceramics that might belong to the Early Classic. Almost all the other artifacts from M7 date to the Late Classic period. Few lots from these excavations, however, would have recovered anything but the last phases of the structure. Only the artifacts from the lower strata of the architectural probe will help suggest a date for the first construction of M7.

Mound 16 and 17: Sub-Op. 20

This sub-operation was excavated in order to (1) determine the nature of ancillary residential architecture, and (2) ascertain the forms of previous constructions as determined by the off-architecture excavations. The excavation unit of these two mounds and intervening space measured 12×4m. However, unlike other excavation units, this trench was not laid out along the normal N/S grid. Because the orientation of the two mounds deviated too much from a north-south line, strict adherence to the grid was not warranted in this case. The resulting trench extended from N41.5 to N54, and E-36.5 to E-30.3.

Excavation revealed only the northern facade of M16's platform at ca. N43 – only 1m north of the southern boundary of the excavation unit. It was clear from this wall that M16 was as much as 15° N of E while all other structures at the site had been oriented roughly due north. The M16-platform north facade consisted of a four-course rough cobblestone wall. At the eastern edge of the excavation unit, at roughly N43.5, there appeared to be a rough step construction that would have eased access from the patio floor to the top of M16's platform. Some large cobbles abutted the north facade as if to function as an informal step.

Abutting to the north of this facade was a very uneven cobble-paved patio floor. This floor was exposed at ca. 1000.20m. This floor is peculiar for (1) the variation in its components, and (2) its particular shape. First, the area of the patio floor within 1m of the north facade of M16 consisted of regular medium-sized faced cobbles while the cobbles in the middle of the patio were very large smoothed and faced cobble flag-

stones, some measuring up to 50cm in length. The smaller stones nearer to M16 constituted a very tightly paved floor, while as the floor extends northward toward M17, the cobblestones not only were larger but also more loosely positioned. Second, this floor did not extend throughout the whole excavation unit. The surface not only failed to extend across the whole patio to M17 to the north but also did not even extend across M16's entire N facade. In the excavation unit, this floor covered only a 3×4m area, beginning roughly at N43/E-33, abutting here the north facade of M16, and extending north only to N47/E-33. The floor extended beyond the eastern limit of the excavation. The patio area around this floor was a compact soil similar to the surface of Patio 1. To the west, the excavation unit was wide enough to expose the western limit of this floor as well as a portion of M16's north facade that did not have this floor abutting it. The compact soil layer was the only indication of a surface in this part of the excavation unit.

Excavation also exposed the southern (W1) and eastern facades (W2) of M17's platform – the corner was located at N49.60/E-32.30. These two facades consisted of 3 courses of roughly faced cobbles. The construction pattern of both M16 and M17 were similar to each other, while both were notably poorer in quality than that found at other structures at the site. Excavation proceeded to expose the top of M17 to locate any evidence of superstructures. The very first indication was an alignment of stones (W3) running roughly N/S from the southern facade of M17 to the northern edge of the excavation unit. Moreover, the cobbles of this stone line all faced eastward. Close inspection of W1 where it intersected with W3 showed that there was a concomitant vertical alignment of cobbles in the facade wall. It therefore became clear that W1 and W3 once cornered. This fact suggested that W3 could have been the original eastern facade of M17, and W2 represented an extension to M17 to the east. The fact that M17 was built in at least two phases validated the excavation of a few small probes along the W3 face to determine the fill nature of M17's extension.

A small probe to the N of W1 and to the east of W3 immediately revealed another wall – W6 – that ran parallel to W3 but faced westward. Excavation had revealed another structure (M17a) separate from M17 that was then combined and engulfed by the extension to M17. The probe was extended in-between the east-facing W3 and the west facing W6. Excavation then uncovered yet another wall – W7 – that faced southward and cornered with W6. The north and western facades of M17a were thus located – cornering at N50.50/E-34.10. Excavation revealed that W7 was demolished on the eastern end, and ends before it can intersect with W2.

The material culture of this unit was primarily utilitarian with little evidence of elite wares. In fact, to the east of W2 of M17, a deposit of large Casaca-jars sherds was located.

Conclusions

The Patio 1 excavations indicate a series of very low-level conclusions. Most clearly, these excavations establish a predominantly early Coner (A.D. 650-750) occupation span for the patio group. Yet, there is strong evidence for an earlier occupation in the Late Preclassic and/or early Classic. The nature of how these two occupations integrate remains somewhat equivocal in Patio 1, although there are indications that they are two

distinct phases. Architecturally, Patio 1 is mostly rustic cobble-masonry. The cut-stone bench in front of M7 suggests an elevated degree of elite symbolism, especially for an area so lacking in cut-stone masonry. Moreover, the intricate construction and modifications of M7 suggest not only a prolonged occupation span, but also an ability of Patio 1 residents to call upon tribute-labor on multiple occasions. The material culture also suggests the elite status of the primary residents of Patio 1. The tanged lance point and the jade pendant clearly relate to an elite material culture. However, the complete lack of stucco floors and plastered surfaces (erosion, notwithstanding) indicate the limited power and wealth of rural elites compared to those within the Copán valley.

The ancillary structures of M16 and M17 still remain somewhat enigmatic – but their utilitarian artifacts associated with their excavation suggest a domestic function – perhaps associated with Patio 1. The floor abutting M16 probably functioned as a preparation surface – perhaps associated with the daily needs of Patio 1 residents.

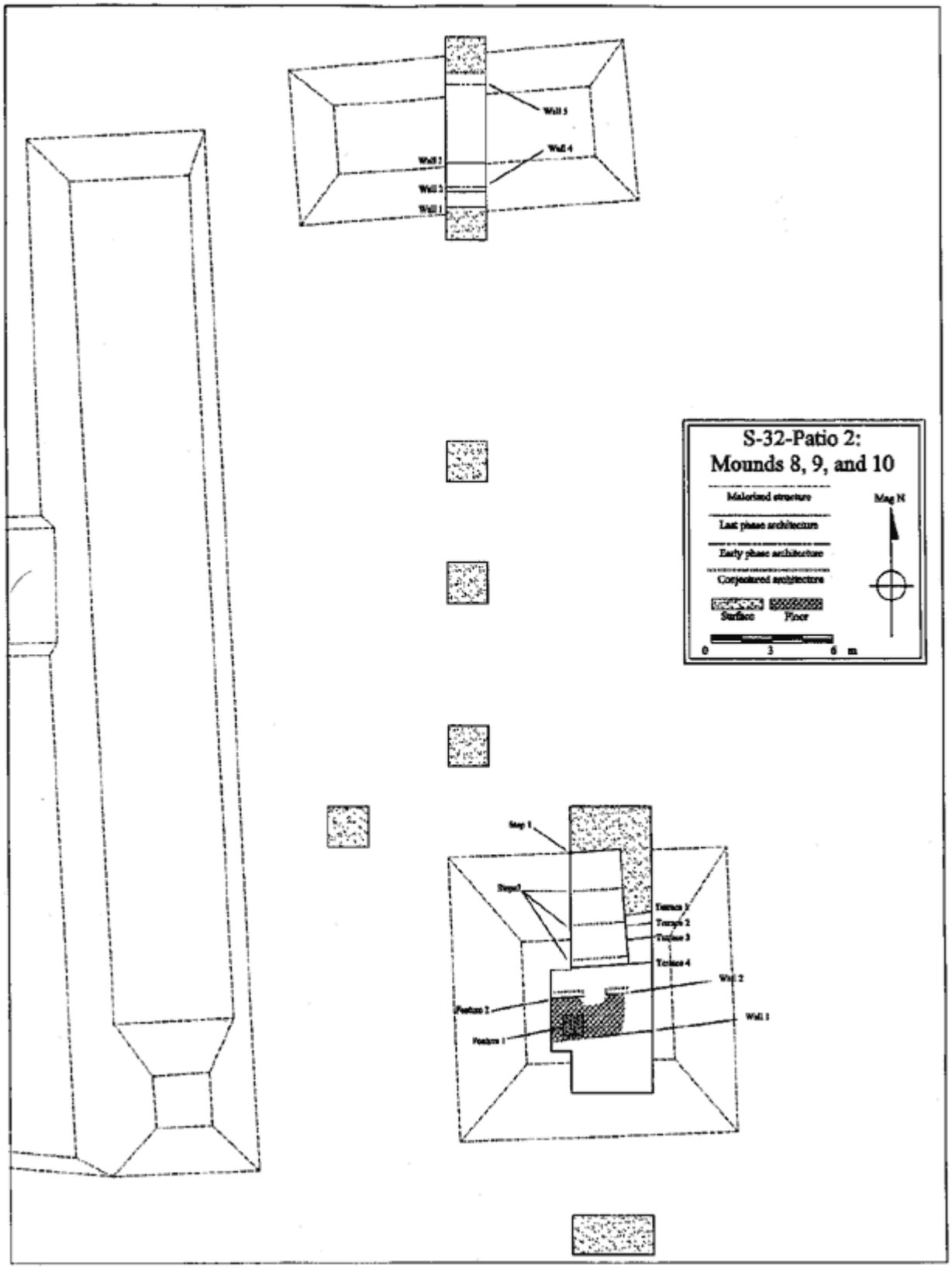

Figure 8: S-32, Patio 2, Mound 8, 9 and 10.

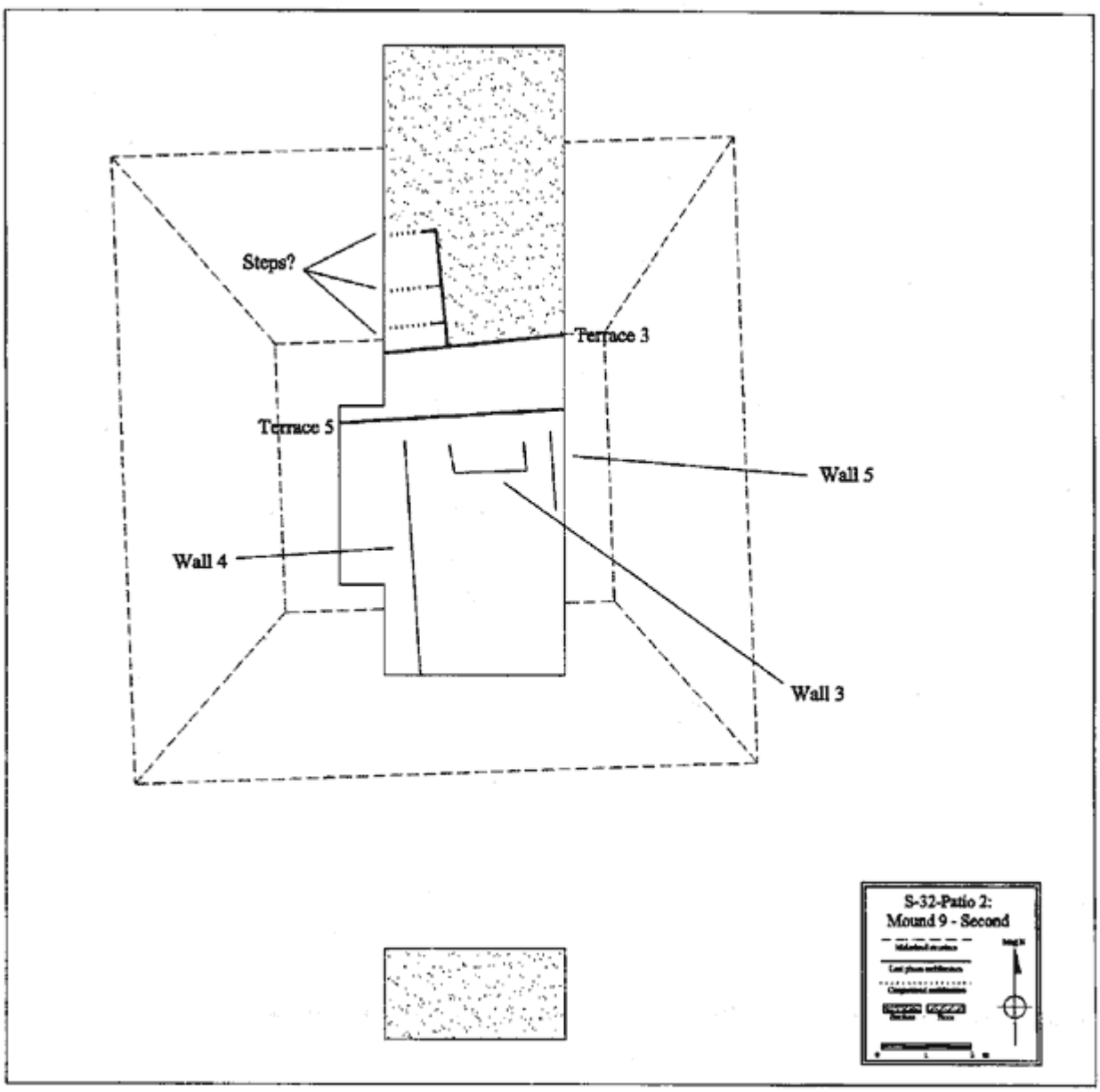

Figure 9: S-32, Patio 2, Mound 9 - 2nd.

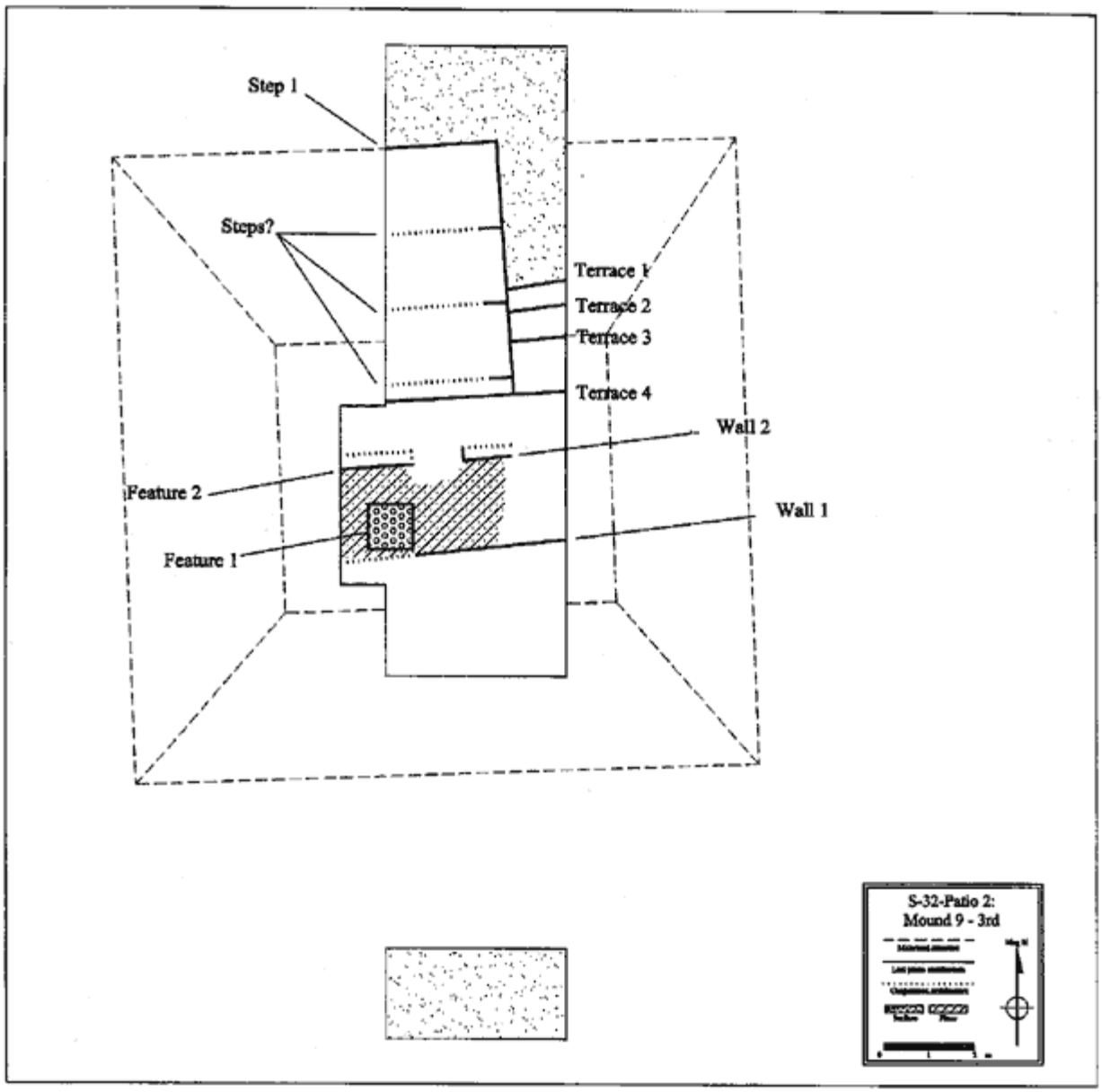

Figure 10: S-32, Patio 2, Mound 9 - 3rd.

Excavations of S-32, Patio 2
(Figure 8, Figure 9, and Figure 10)

Main patio: Sub-Op. 14, 15, 16, 17

These four non-contiguous sub-operations were placed within Patio 2 of S-32. They were located along the center lines of M8, M9 and M10 in order to (1) investigate the

nature of the patio surface, (2) ascertain how many construction phases might be found, and (3) determine whether any feature might be found along these center lines of these structures.

The excavations of these four 2×2 test units were limited. Excavations at SOps 14, 15, and 16 proceeded only 10cm and then stopped. These quick probes did not find any evidence of a prepared surface, nor the placement of an altar as in Patio 1. In these three units, at the elevation of ca. 1002.00m, a compact surface consisting of small pebbles and natural sterile sediment was revealed. While this stratum does not appear to be a floor, it may represent a natural surface that was slightly modified and flattened. However, a continuous formally prepared surface was lacking entirely. Artifacts were collected from all three units.

SOp17 follows the same pattern as the other units. However, a deeper stratigraphic probe was excavated in this unit to correlate the stratigraphy in Patio 2 with that of Patio 1. Within 15cm of the surface, a compact strata was encountered similar to that of the other three units in this patio. Excavation progressed to 1001.85m, where a reddish-brown compacted sandy layer was revealed – similar to that found in SOp10. This layer was excavated down to an elevation of 1001.20m. In this layer, no artifacts were recovered.

Mound 9: Sub-Op. 13, 23, 19

SOp19: This sub-operation was excavated in order to determine the nature of artifacts that would have been associated with M9. This unit was a 2×4m (N0 to N2 and E10 to E14) trench far enough south of M9 to avoid standing architecture.

Excavation progressed only 40cm in this unit before hitting sterile sediments. The artifacts recovered form this shallow unit, however, were very particular. The ceramic assemblage did not show any early Coner sherds at all. In fact, most of the ceramics appeared to be typically Acbi sherds. In fact, an Usulután fragment with mammiform-foot scars was also within 15cm of the surface. Unlike SOp8, these early ceramics were found near the surface and in direct association with the surface architecture. The unit was terminated upon reaching 1002.65m.

SOp13 and 23 (Figure 9 and Figure 10): These two sub-operations were designed to expose the central axis of the tallest structure as S-32. Given the location of Patio 2 to the north of M9, it was assumed that M9 would face toward the north, with its primary access up that face. This assumption proved true. In the following discussion, the two sub-operations will be treated as a single exposure measuring 14×4m unit (N8 to N22, and E10 to E14). At the summit of the mound, the excavation was expanded 1m to the W (to the E9 line) in order to expose fully a feature found straddling the western limit of the excavations.

Because the excavations of this structure were somewhat complex and varied, the report will not progress in the same order as the excavation of the structure, but rather describe how the structure from its last to earliest phases was constructed. Description

of the excavational procedure will be mentioned within the chronological framework of the architecture. The M9 structure consists of 3 distinct phases of construction and use. Description will begin with the latest and proceed to describe each of the previous phases and its connections to other phases.

M9-3rd represents M9's last full architectural phase, during which the structure achieved its greatest size and height. Excavations of this phase consisted of both summit and N-facade clearings which revealed not only a rustic staircase leading down to the Patio 2 surface to the north, but also clear evidence of a superstructure on the summit of the platform. This discussion will first describe the summit excavations, and then progress to an analysis of the N-facade of M9's platform.

The very first discernible feature in the summit excavations consisted of a square cobble feature (F1) located at roughly N11.4/E10.2. This feature was first encountered as a cobble surfacing only few centimeters below the natural surface level. This surfacing consisted of small-faced cobbles – resembling those found within the room of M7. As excavation revealed the extension of this surfacing, small-cobble walls were found surrounding and delimiting this cobble flooring. It became clear that 4 small cobble "mini"-walls constructed constituting a square feature circumscribed this floor. These walls faced inward and consisted of small rocks (hand-sized) lined in very tight miniature rows. Moreover, the soil lying on the cobble feature's flooring was loose and ashen. The matrix that surrounded the four mini-walls and their surface was heavily mixed with burnt clay – *bajareque*. Small probes along the side of F1 indicated that this bajareque ran **underneath** it. It became clear that F1 was constructed on top of the bajareque stratum. The ashen nature of the soil contained within the cobble walls attests to some sort of burning events associated with this feature.

Around F1, excavation cleared a 4×5m area on the summit of M9. Throughout this exposure, within 5cm of the ground level, a large concentration of cobbles was encountered strewn about the summit. Within these cobbles, many small specks of bajareque were found. While the cobbles did not appear to have any clear faces that would suggest their use as facade-stones, there was a very rough patterning that suggested a wall (W1) running east west to the south of F1. Surrounding F1 and in the area to the N of W1, a bajareque stratum was revealed that measured 7cm in thickness in some areas. While somewhat inconsistent in thickness throughout the unit, it was encountered to the west of F1 and to the north of W1. Along the northern limit of the summit excavation (N14), two other architectural elements were found that help interpret the bajareque stratum as a floor and W1 as a part of the superstructure construction. The first element was located in the northwestern corner of the summit exposure where an ambiguous concentration of cobbles was encountered – F2. The bajareque stratum **lipped up** to this feature. Moreover, F2 was very similar to that of W1 and may therefore represent another wall of the superstructure (a northern wall) to which the bajareque floor would have abutted. The second element was a short wall segment (W2). At roughly 2m north of W1, a short series of faced cobbles not only aligned parallel to W1 but also faced south (inward) to W1. Although W2 was only 1.2m in length, its placement suggested its function as the internal face of a superstructure wall in relation to W1. Moreover, W2 was separated from F2 (the cobble concentration

in the northwestern part of the excavation unit) by a 1.2m area that lacked the bajareque stratum.

The summit evidence, although ephemeral and vague, suggested the existence of a relatively large superstructure for M9's last phase within which a locus for ritual activity was placed. W1 would have been the southern (back) wall of the superstructure, F2 represented part of a northern superstructure wall, and W2 would have been part of the inside facing of the northern superstructure wall. The space in-between W2 and F2 could have been an entrance heavily trampled and therefore more worn than the rest of the area. Finally, the area delimited by W1, W2 and F2 was entirely covered by the bajareque stratum which even lipped up to F2 and abuts W2. Finally, within the area delimited by Wall 1, W2 and F2 and resting upon the bajareque surface was F1 – clearly a locus of burning as evidenced by the ashen soil found within it.

The north facade excavations of M9-3rd revealed that the structure had an outset staircase leading from Patio 2 to the summit. Excavations also revealed 4 distinct terraces leading to the summit of the mound. Therefore, the north facade excavations revealed 4 east west terrace walls (T 1-4), and 1 north south staircase wall (SW 1). As with the great majority of the construction at the site, the terraces and outset stairs were cobble-masonry. The construction of the M9 terraces, however, represented the best construction technique at the site – an indication of not only the difficulty inherent to large cobble architecture but also of the importance of this largest structure at S-32.

SW1 – the eastern facade of the outset staircase – ran north south through the excavation unit at E12.7. It consisted of relatively large cobbles organized in order to make three large "steps" from the patio surface to M9's summit. The wall was in a poor state of preservation. It appears as if the architectural fill it contained to the west had bowed it to the east and even toppled it in some places. This wall rested on a compact earthen level that was the P2 surface (elevation 1002.40m). Running perpendicular to SW1, four terraces (T1-4) were found to the east along the following gridlines: N16.7, N16.2, N15.2, and N14.2 (respectively). T1 rested on the same earthen level as SW1 at elevation 1002.40m. The top of T4 – the summit level at which F1, F2, W1 and W2 were found – was at elevation 1005.70m. Therefore, in the M9-3rd phase, the platform measured 3.3m in height. At initial inspection it was clear that T1 and T2 abutted SW1, while both T3 and T4 were abutted by SW1. Finally, it appeared that T4 was built on T3, suggesting that T4 was constructed after T3. From this conclusion of the construction techniques of these 5 different walls, an initial building sequence was established: T3, then T4, then SW1, and then T1/T2. How this sequence related to building phases will be discussed below.

To the east of SW1, excavation revealed a jumbled assortment of cobbles that also contained much of the architectural fall from the superstructure's collapse. Moreover, since stairs preserve poorly when constructed with cut stone, the lack of continuous alignments in the context of cobble-masonry did not appear abnormal. Finally, the fact that much of SW1 had been tumbled over by the stair fill suggested that little if any of the original staircase would be encountered. Such issues notwithstanding, a clear step (ST1) was found at N19.76 and ephemeral evidence of other alignments at N17.9,

N16.2, and N14.6. Excavation was also able to distinguish the staircase fill from the overlying tumble and architectural fall from the superstructure. Once completely exposed, it became clear, that the outset staircase fill ascended to the elevation of T4 and abutted it. In fact, SW1 abutted T4 all the way up to the summit level of 1005.70m. Since both the staircase fill and SW1 abutted T4, it became clear that the outset stairs would have led up to the very summit of the platform – the top of T4. Therefore, it was concluded that during M9-3rd phase, T1-4 was visible only to the east of SW1, since to the west the outset stairs covered all the terraces up to the summit at elevation 1005.70m.

M9-2nd was discovered while the excavations of the staircase fill was in progress. Another north south staircase wall (SW2) was revealed along the E11.3 gridline – 1.4m to the west of SW1. SW2 had clearly been buried by the fill of SW1 because it was a shorter wall that abutted T3 only. SW2 did not extend upward to T4. Moreover, because T1 and T2 abutted SW1, they did not extend beyond SW1 to abut with SW2. The area between SW1 and SW2 was excavated with great care in order to (1) collect all cultural material that would effectively seal the M9-2nd construction phase chronologically and (2) expose the basal courses of both T3 and SW2. Excavation showed that both SW2 and T3 rested on the same compact surface as T1 at elevation 1002.60m.

Given this evidence concerning T3 and SW2, the construction sequence of M9 was partially resolved with the conclusion that T3 and SW2 were contemporary constructions. In fact T3 was the northern facade of M9-2nd while SW2 was the eastern facade of an outset staircase for M9-2nd that led up to T3. M9-3rd represented a widening of the outset staircase to the east with the construction of SW1 that buried SW2, and the addition of two more terraces to the north of T3 and abutting SW2 to the east.

The top of T4 was at elevation 1005.70m, but the stairs of SW2 ascended only to elevation 1004.5m (the top of T3 and the foot of T4). It became evident that T4 was not contemporaneous with SW2 since the stairs of the M9-2nd phase only led up to the foot rather than to the top of T4, making the summit of M9-3rd unreachable (T4 is a 1.2m high terrace). However, the excavations from the summit of M9-3rd showed absolutely no evidence of any surface or superstructure at the top of T3 – elevation 1004.5m. Yet, at elevation 1005.00m, evidence of a previous superstructure was in fact found. This find suggested that it was more likely that the summit of M9-2nd was to be found at 1005.00m. Clearly an access to the 1005.00m elevation from the top of T3 would be required for M9-2nd.

Access to the elevation of 1005.00m from the top of T3 was achieved with yet another terrace that lay buried by the T4 construction. Excavation removed a section of T4 and uncovered another terrace (T5) that in parts ascended to elevation 1005.00m – nearly to the elevation of the hypothesized M9-2nd summit. T5 was a partially destroyed terrace that ran roughly 30cm behind (to the south) of T4. While somewhat uneven, this terrace showed the same type of construction as T1-4. Excavations were not able to determine the elevation of its lowest course, but it was clear that this course was below

the level of the top of T3 – in other words, T5 was not built like T4 rather it was built either at the same time or before T3.

In terms of its summit, M9-2nd was somewhat more equivocal than M9-3rd. At the elevation of 1005.10m, three enigmatic architectural elements were revealed. At N12.6/E12.4 a 0.8×1.8m wall block was encountered (W3). It first came to light at elevation 1005.50m – 20cm below the M9-3rd summit. As excavations continued to clear downward, this wall block was further revealed. It had been completely buried by the fill of M9-3rd, but its lowest course rested on the 1005.1m elevation determined for the M9-2nd superstructure making it the only evidence of standing architecture from the S-32. Curiously, W3 was faced on all its sides except its northern one. To the east and west of W3, two very amorphous cobble scatters were encountered. Similar to the amorphous cobble alignment of W1 of M9-3rd, the cobble alignment (W4) to the west of M9-2nd runs north south from the top edge of T5 to the southern limit of the excavation (N8). At this southern limit, a few large cobbles were found suggesting that W4 turns a corner to the east. To the east of W3, another amorphous cluster of cobbles roughly aligns north south (W5). This alignment seems to dissipate at roughly N10. All these architectural elements were found resting on the same uniform clayey soil. No evidence of a floor was found. These amorphous and indeterminate architectural elements clearly represented part of the M9-2nd superstructure. However, the fact that this superstructure was probably partially destroyed to construct M9-3rd makes the reconstruction more difficult.

The combined evidence from these excavations suggests that M9-2nd consisted of a 2.6m high platform upon which a cobble superstructure was built. Access to the top level was through an outset staircase that led to the top of T3 – the bottom of T5. The superstructure of M9-2nd was built on top of T5. This superstructure was then partially destroyed and completely buried by the construction of M9-3rd. The architectural fill that was encountered in-between M9-2nd and M9-3rd phases was very interesting in its lack of Late Classic ceramics. Although architectural fill does not necessarily represent an accurate chronological marker for construction, the particularly unique character of the ceramic assemblage recovered from this context may suggest that M9-2nd did in fact represent an Early Classic phase of construction. In the M9-3rd phase, the T4 wall was constructed to the north of T5 and on top of T3 in order to raise the platform summit by 70cm to 1005.70m. This expansion upward not only buried the M9-2nd superstructure but also provided more space for the M9-3rd superstructure. This amplification of the platform required that the outset stairs also be heightened and widened in order to access fully the new summit of the platform. This amplification of the stairs buried the SW2 facade and constructed the SW1 facade. The increased height of this cobble-masonry platform required some buttressing that took the form of the T1 and T2 walls at the base of T3. Finally, the ceramics recovered form the fall contexts of M9-3rd contained mostly early Coner ceramics – a very different assemblage from that found in the fill between the 2nd and 3rd phases.

M9-1st phase will be discussed in a very limited fashion since evidence for this phase was gathered from a very limited deep probe into the fill of the structure. A 2×2m unit was excavated from the M9-2nd summit (1005.00m) down through the entire fill to the

sterile level 2.8m deep at elevation 1002.2m. From roughly 1005.00m to 1003.40m excavation removed several levels of uniform fill with few artifacts. The ceramics recovered from these strata were Early Classic – just as the ceramics from the fill that buried and cancelled M9-2nd.

At the 1003.40m elevation the strata soil changed from relatively sandy soil to a dark brown clayey soil containing many more artifacts. The ceramics from this stratum were entirely early – some even of Late Preclassic origin. Excavation continued through this matrix and found sterile at 1002.20m. Because of the restricted nature of the probe, the excavation could not determine the precise nature of this dark clay stratum at 1003.40m. However, this matrix was very similar in consistency and composition to the material from which the clay-structures found in the early contexts in the Acropolis of Copán are composed. Because of this similarity, this stratum was interpreted as the surface of a small clay platform dating to the Early Classic or even earlier. This platform would have been only 1.2m high.

Mound 10: Sub-Op. 22

This sub-operation was excavated in order to (1) determine the nature of rural elite residential architecture, (2) ascertain the forms of previous constructions as determined by the probe excavations within the architecture. M10 was excavated with a 10×2m (N50 to N60 and E4 to E6) trench that crossed the width of the structure along its central axis.

Excavation began on the southern side of the mound. While very few sherds were encountered in the first strata, a great jumble of rough cobbles was revealed. Among these cobbles, moreover, a laurel-lead shape lance point was recovered. This point was made from the same lithic material as that of the tanged point found in SOp11. It measured 7×4×.25cm. With further clearing, a rough two-course cobble wall was revealed running across the unit at N52. It became clear that this wall (W1) represented the front (south) facade of the M10 platform. Moreover, unlike all other large structures at the site, this platform's wall appeared extremely rustic and badly preserved. With further clearing of the topsoil, two rougher cobble walls were encountered. W2 was found running along N52.6, and W3 was found somewhat removed from W1 and W2 at N54. All three walls rested on an earthen matrix and none of them had more than 2 courses of stones. W1 rested on elevation 1001.80m, W2 on 1002.00m,and W3 was on 1002.20m. Since each wall was only roughly 20cm tall, the three matched perfectly to create 3 small front terraces. All three walls appeared "sloppily" constructed – rough irregularly-shaped cobbles loosely aligned.

Because W3 was removed to the N from W2 by 1.4m, it is possible that W3 represented the remnant of a superstructural basal wall rather than a platform terrace. To investigate this possibility, excavation began to clear to the north of W3 – at elevation 1002.25m to see if any evidence pertaining to the superstructure were evident as well as to locate the northern (back) facade of the platform. This excavation did not encounter a wall – only an area at roughly N58 with a cobble concentration that probably represented a collapsed wall. The platform surface also exhibited no evidence of the superstructure.

Excavation then began to investigate more specifically the construction technique and chronology of Walls 1, 2, and 3. All three walls were surrounded by a loose dry matrix with a multitude of air pockets that suggested a great deal of disturbance. Removal of this matrix revealed an underlying stratum of a more compact soil within which a completely separate and distinct cobble wall (W4) was located running across the unit at N52.5 at an elevation of 1001.60m. This buried wall was much better preserved and much more tightly constructed with smaller cobbles. It became evident that an earlier M10 structure had been encountered.

This discovery allowed for the excavation of the area to the N of W3 down through the fill of the second phase of M10 to the level of M10's earlier phase. This fill was a very loose and cobble-filled soil. Excavation was halted at elevation 1001.45m where the remnants of another wall (W5) were located protruding from the eastern profile of the excavation unit at N57.5. This partial wall was constructed at the same elevation as W4. Moreover, its composition and construction were more similar to that of W4 than to that of the other three walls. It became clear that the earlier construction was roughly 5m in width while the later construction was probably on the order of 6.5m wide. Furthermore, the lowest wall of the second phase of construction, W1, rests at an elevation roughly equivalent to that of Walls 4 and 5. This fact suggests that the construction of M10's second phase must have been a simple amplification of the mounds – in length as well as in breadth.

Excavation proceeded to investigate the fill that correlated with Walls 4 and 5. Excavation also progressed to the strata below Walls 4 and 5. These levels were much more compact and consistent than those closer to the surface. In fact, the layer upon which rest Walls 4 and 5 is a dark-brown organic-rich soil that may have been an even older midden. Excavation was terminated at roughly 1000.60m where sterile sediments were revealed.

Conclusion

The excavation of this patio was dominated by the interesting results from M9, while the equivocal remains revealed in relation to M10 rendered interpretation at best general. Excavation of M9 was a relatively complex series of probes and exposures that distinguished three distinct phases of construction. However, these three phases did not represent a gradual evolutionary sequence of architectural development. While M9-3rd was a "logical" expansion of M9-2nd, M9-1st was very different from both. Independent of the final conclusions, it is clear the M9 was a locus of human activity far earlier than the Late Classic. The excavations of M10 distinguished two phases of construction as well – an interesting parallel with M9-2nd and M9-3rd. The amplification of M9 and M10 could temporally relate to a site-wide program of construction undertaken in early Coner. An in-depth analysis of the ceramics recovered from these excavations will help determine the feasibility of this scenario.

Excavation around the structures and in the center of the patio revealed a packed-earth surface as well a host of Early Classic ceramics related to it. While this information is

extremely preliminary, a general comparison of the ceramic assemblages from Patio 1 and 2 suggests that Patio 2 preceded the constructions of Patio 1.

Finally, the apparent discontinuity between M9-1st and M9-2nd/3rd may be further proof of a dual occupation of the site. Much like the enigmatic early contexts of M6, M9's first phase may in fact represent an early occupation unrelated to the early Coner occupation that represents the majority of the surface architecture. This conclusion remains very preliminary and will heavily depend on the detailed analysis of the artifacts and ecofacts recovered from this probe.

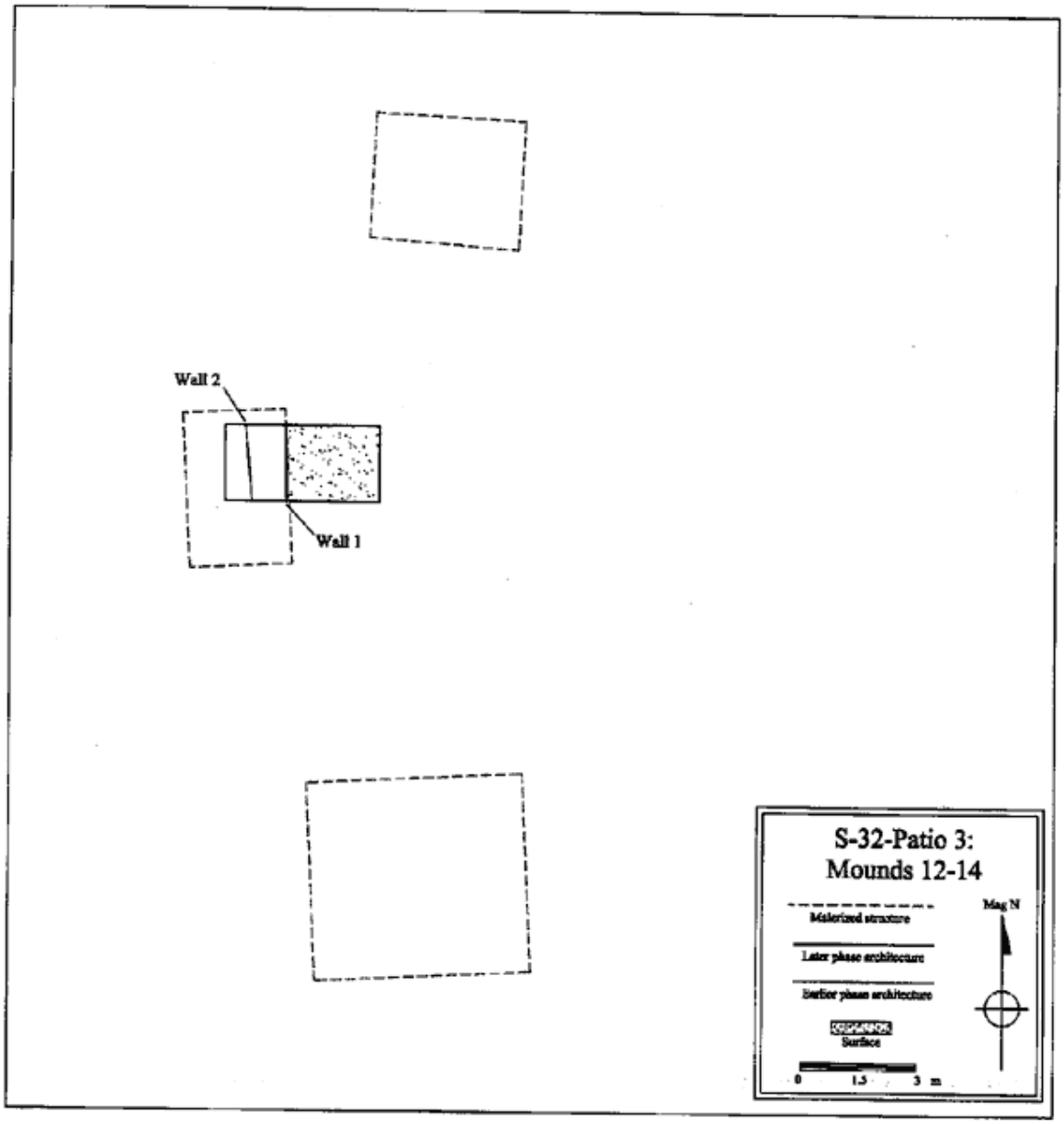

Figure 11: S-32, Patio 3, Mounds 12-14.

Excavation of S-32, Patio 3
(Figure 11)

Mound 13: Sub-Op. 26

This sub-operation was placed within Patio 3 of S-32. It was a small 2×4m test unit along the centerline of M13 in order to (1) investigate the nature of the patio surface, (2) determine the orientation, architecture, and chronology of this structure. The excavation unit was placed at N96 to N90 and E4 to E8. Because this patio exhibits a much smaller scale than the rest of the structures at the site, it became incumbent to relate it to the rest of the site, however generally.

This probe to the east of M13 in Patio 3 – a very low ephemeral mound much smaller and simpler than most of the structures excavated from S-32. Excavation immediately revealed two parallel lines of stone facing east. The easternmost line (W1) was the eastern facade of M13's platform at E5.6, while the other stone line (W2) at E4.6 remained enigmatic. A meter-wide probe excavation was undertaken between W1 and W2 to expose the facade of W2. Both walls are virtually identical in size, cobble composition, and complexity. It is possible that W2 was an original eastern facade of M13's platform. A meter-wide extension to the east of this platform would have buried W2 and necessitated a new eastern facade – W1. Excavation in the extension fill revealed a myriad of early Coner ceramics. To the east of W1 there was no evidence of a patio floor – only a compact surface upon which both walls were built at elevation 999.2m.

The small patio formed by M12, 13, and 14 appears to be a small residential group tacked on to the northern port of S-32. Chronologically and stylistically it belongs to the group and not to an earlier or much later phase.

Conclusion

While little specific can be said about this section of the site given the minimum excavations in this area, it is clear that (1) this small Patio does coincide with the general chronological sequence of the site, and (2) it too, its small dimensions notwithstanding, was subject to architectural modifications. Although this latter characteristic does not tender any specific interpretation, it does imply a certain degree of architectural investment in the site.

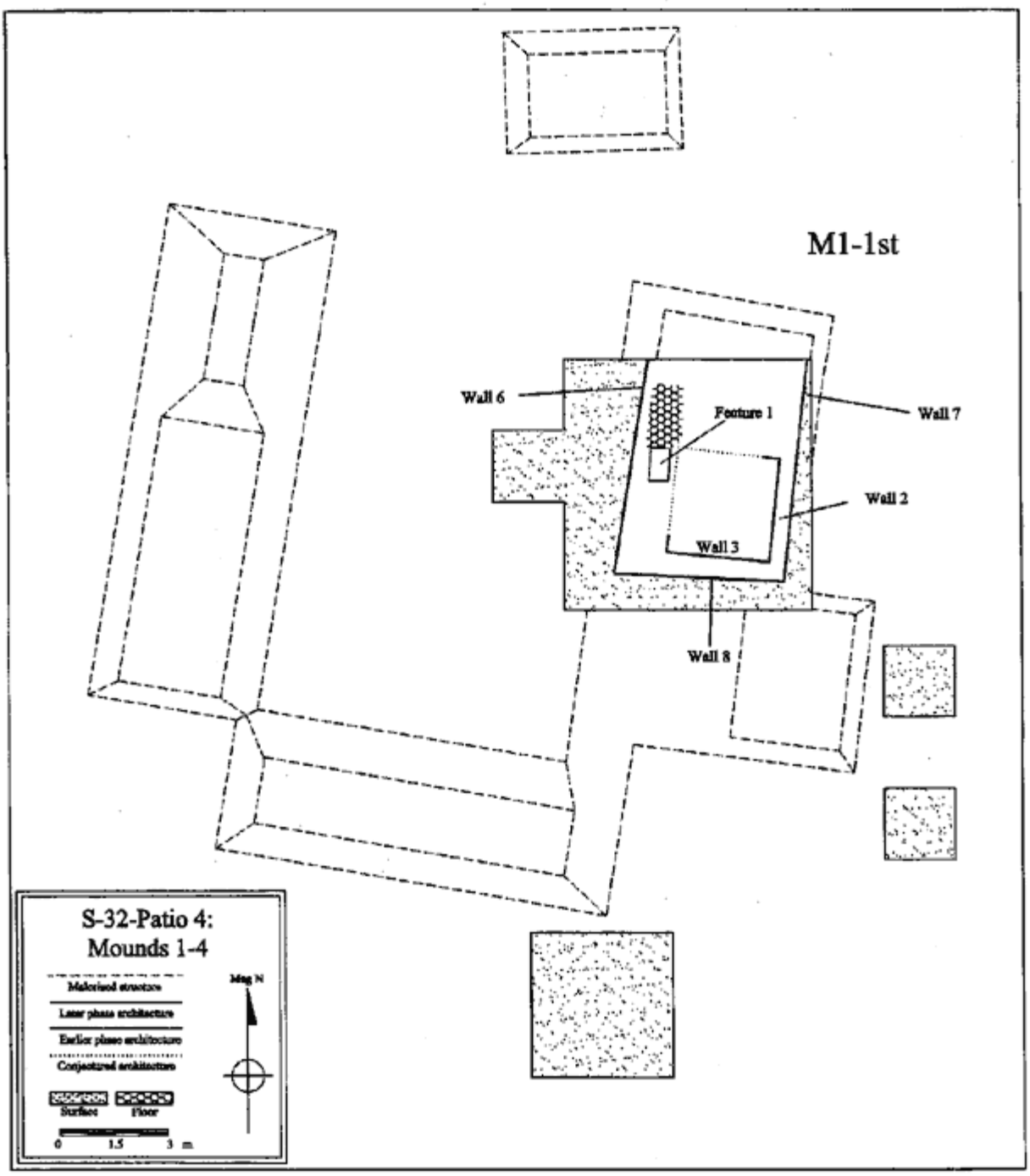

Figure 12: M1-1st.

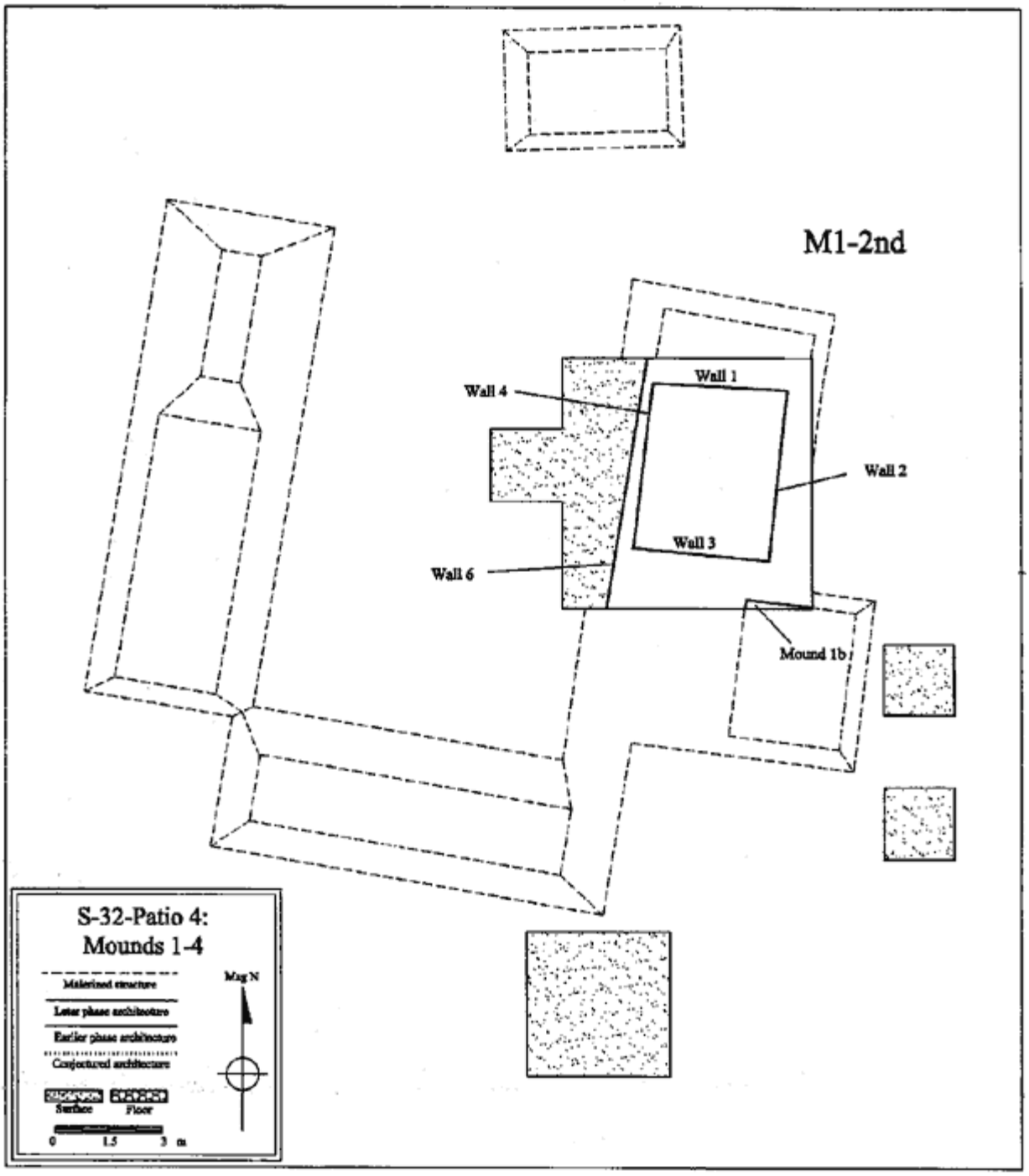

Figure 13: M1-2nd.

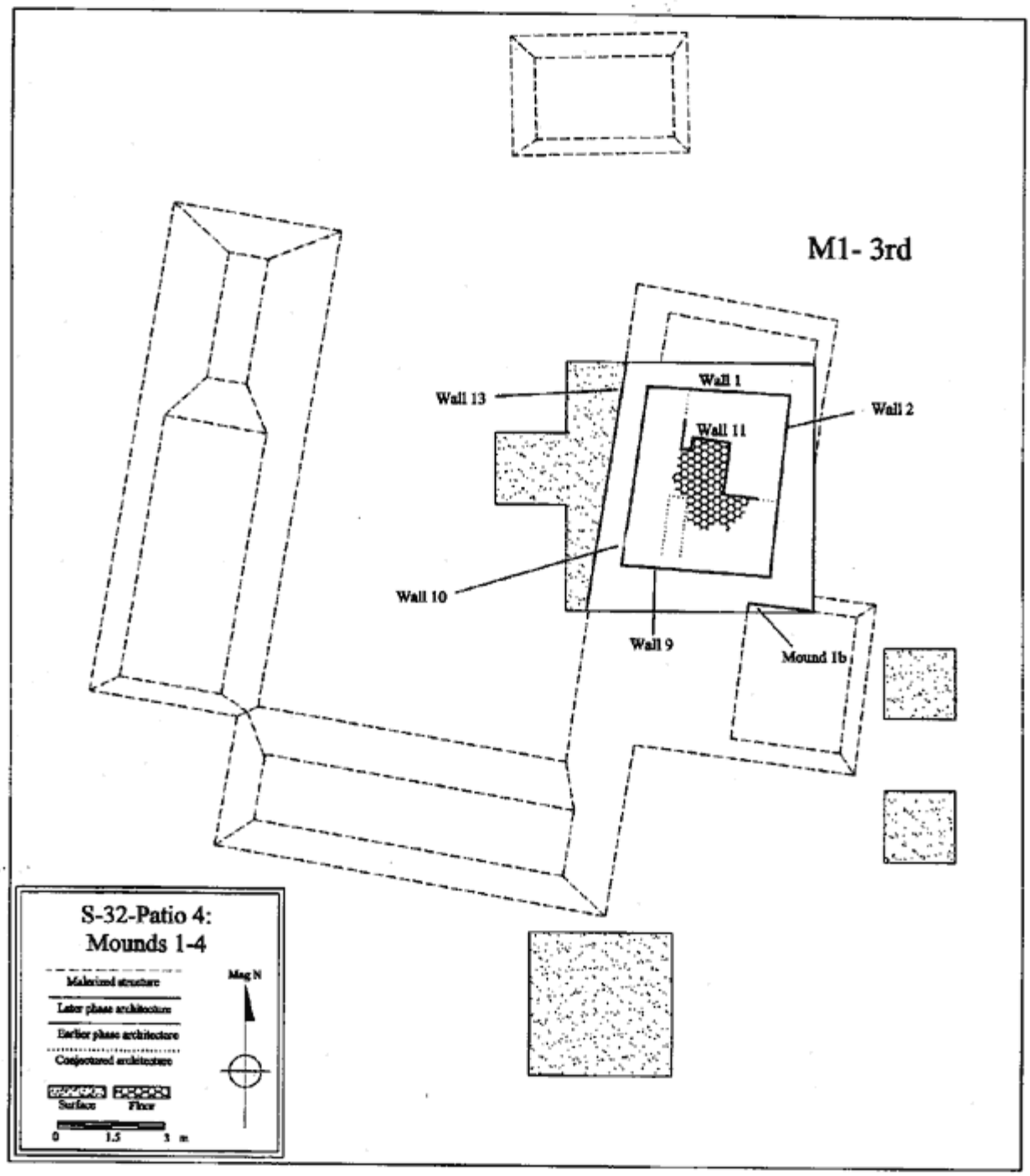

Figure 14: M1-3rd.

Excavation of S-32, Patio 4

(Figure 12, Figure 13 and Figure 14)

Mound 1, 1b: Sub-Op. 12, 22

Excavation of this structure represents the greatest horizontal exposure at S-32. M1 was partially destroyed by road construction roughly two decades ago. On the surface it appeared as if it had been sliced in half. Excavation of this mound first began as a simple attempt to salvage as much information as possible from an exposed architectural profile. It became clear from the outset that the half of the mound that remained was in a very good state of preservation. Given that a complete profile of its construction sequence was available, a concomitant full exposure of the remaining mound would provide the complementary synchretic information that none of the other stratigraphic probes could achieve. Moreover, because this structure was already so destroyed, the destructive nature of excavation could be better justified than it could for other "recoverable" structures.

Excavation, therefore, opened a 7×7m unit (from N-17 to N-10 and from E-19 to E-12) that fully exposed the southern half of a structure oriented north south. Moreover, a second structure (Mound 1b) was partially uncovered along the southern edge of the excavation unit. Mound 1b was not visible from the surface. Like in the case of M9, the excavations of this structure proved extremely intricate, as all the small adjustments, modifications, and amplifications to the structure were completely revealed. While the precise nature of some elements of the earliest phase of construction remain equivocal, excavation was able to distinguish four distinct phases of construction. The following discussion will describe the structure from the earliest to earliest insofar as it was determinable in the excavations.

M1-1st: (Figure 12) In its first phase, this mound was probably a stand-alone structure consisting of a sub-platform, platform, and perishable superstructure. The excavation was able to determine that in the first phase, a low 15cm sub-platform provided the base for a smaller platform. The western (W6), southern (W7), and eastern (W8) facades of this sub-platform were revealed. The southern and eastern facades of this sub-platform would eventually be buried by later construction in such way as to leave only the surface of the top course of these walls exposed. Although it was not determined for all three sides exposed by excavation, this sub-platform descended to an elevation of 1002.80m where it rested on a compacted earthen surface. To the north, the limit of this sub-platform was not determined because it extended beyond the limits of the excavation (which could not, in turn, be extended because it would have interfered with a modern road). However, both W6 and W2 (western and eastern facades of M1-1st sub-platform) were shown to extend beyond the excavation's northern limit.

The platform constructed in the southeast corner of this sub-platform was exposed by excavation only on its southern and eastern facades. In fact, the existence of M1-1st platform was deduced only from the full exposure of the cobble-masonry walls 2 and 3 as they pertained to later construction phases. Both these walls appeared to have vertical alignments in the cobble courses that indicated that they had been extended. At some point in the construction sequence of the structure, W3 was extended to the west and W2 was extended to the north. Hence, the M1-1st platform was not exposed in its original dimensions – in other words, the western and northern facades of M1-1st platform were only hypothesized given the apparent construction sequences of W2 and W3. However, the deduced dimensions of the M1-1st platform are roughly 3m×3m, and 80cm high.

To the northwest of the M1-1st platform, at elevation 1003.00m, a small portion of a floor was exposed. This floor consisted of small flat cobbles much like the floor found in the superstructure room of M7. The extent of this floor was extremely limited. Moreover, the excavations were not able to expose much of this level.

To the west of M1-1st platform, and due south of the patch of exposed floor, an offering chamber was encountered (Feature 1). This offering chamber was excavated into the floor. The chamber measures 80cm×40cm, with a depth of 35cm. The walls of this niche are lined with small rounded cobbles tightly packed into multiple rows. Excavation was not able to discover any particular offering within this niche – although on the surface, pieces of a rare Copador-type vessel were encountered. However, these ceramics were not found inside the niche – only on its surface. It is plausible that this niche was emptied in antiquity. Moreover, this feature was covered by two cut-stones – smaller versions of the kind found abutting the south facade of M7. Importantly, these two cut stones were placed on top of the niche above the level of the M1-1st platform floor. These covering spanner stones, therefore, were not flush with the floor but raised above it by 30cm. Given this protrusion, it is clear that whatever this niche contained and signified, it was excavated and closed after the construction of the M1-1st platform floor. In fact, it is quite probable that the construction of this niche prompted the construction that led to M2-2nd.

M1-2nd: (Figure 13) In this phase, W3 was extended roughly 35cm to the west while W2 was extended another 45cm to the north. New walls were constructed to the north (W1) and west (W4) to create a larger platform on the same sub-platform visible in M1-1st phase. Because this mound suffered such a severe deformation, much of the northern edge of the structure was completely destroyed. In fact, of W1, only the basal course remained. Moreover, all the north south walls that extended to the northern edge of the excavation unit were also cut down to their basal course. Clearly the modern plow did not dig below the level of these walls because the excavations showed the basal courses of W1, W2, and W6 be below the road surface. Moreover, because neither W2 and W4 do **not** extend beyond W1, while W6 does proves that both W4 to the west and W2 to east cornered with W1 to the north to define the northern limit of the M1-2nd platform.

The enlarged M1-2nd platform covered over the floor as well as the niche. In fact, excavation discovered the existence of this niche from the fact that the fill just above it, behind the new western facade (W4) had slumped quite a bit, causing the cobbles courses of W4 to have collapsed in the specific area. These excavations, therefore, defined the platform for the M1-2nd phase measuring 4.6m×3.7m and roughly 80cm in height.

The sub-platform also underwent obvious alterations in this phase. Wall 6 was extended to the south. In the previous phase, W6 cornered with W8 to define the southern limit of the sub-platform. In this phase, it appears that all of the sub-platform was extended to the south and east thereby necessitating the burial and cancellation of both W7 and W8. This extension resulted in (1) the probable connection of M1 with the southern structure of the patio – M2, (2) the construction of M1b, and (3) the development of this group into a formal sunken patio.

While the excavations did not reach south enough to expose M2's architecture, the W6 wall line seems almost directly oriented with M2 in such a way to suggest that this phase saw the connection of at least three mounds through a single sub-platform. Secondly, to the southeast of the M1-platform excavation revealed another cobble facade that was immediately recognized as pertaining to another structure called M1b. This wall was a segment of the M1b-platform's northern facade. The wall rested on an elevation of 1003.00m and appeared to be constructed on the extended surface of the M1 sub-platform. Finally, the in-filling and burial of the low W7 and W8 walls began to encircle and enclose the patio surface (at elevation 1002.80m) as is the case for sunken patios.

M1-3rd: (Figure 14) This phase represents a second amplification of the platform and the sub-platform. Two new facades – W9 to the south and W10 to the west – were constructed for the M1-platform. W9 cancelled and covered W3, and W10 did the same to W4. The corner shared by W9 and W2 was different clearly showed that W9 abutted W2. However, the W9-W10 corner was intermeshed as would be expected. Moreover, W10 terminated in the same way that its "predecessor" did – flush with the M1 intersection point. From these initial observations it became clear that M9-3rd platform was enlarged to the south and west defining a platform that measured 5m×4.2m, and 80cm in height.

The extension west of the M1-3rd platform pushed the western facade of the platform almost exactly over the western facade of the M1-2nd sub-platform. This amplification would have created a relatively unstable construction since the original M1 sub-platform west terrace was not designed to be a basal wall. In fact, the sub-platform was also expanded to the west by 65cm where a new facade was revealed (W13). Like W6, W13 also descended 20cm, resting on the compact earthen surface of the patio at elevation 1002.80m. W13's construction further restricted and enclosed the patio area.

M1-superstructure: Excavation on the summit of M1 revealed a very well preserved portion of the M1-superstructure (Wall 11). Surprisingly, it was over 6 courses of cobbles in some parts. Given the size and location of Patio 4, the discovery of stone

architecture superstructures was surprising. W11 seemed to represent not a part of external western facade of the M1-superstructure, but also a portion of the internal layout of this superstructure. In fact, the outline of W11 suggests that the superstructure's room contained an L-shaped bench against the northern and eastern inner walls. The rest of the walls of the superstructure were not recovered. Wall 11 rested on a cobble surface that would have been the room's floor (elevation of 1003.80m). To the south of W11, certain vague indications of walls were found in the floor of the superstructure. These alignments were not given a designation because they remained enigmatic. However, they did align generally with the portion of W11 that represented the western exterior facade of the superstructure.

The exact relationship between the superstructure and the latter two phases of M1-platform/subplatform remains somewhat enigmatic. It is clear that this superstructure post-dates M1-1st, but it was not possible to determine specifically whether it was built in M1-2nd or 3rd. Neither the architecture nor the room floor indicated a specific relationship with either of the latter two phases. As the preceding discussion demonstrated, the last phase of M1 represented an amplification of its antecedent and the architectural evidence from the superstructure neither contradicted nor supported the association of this last amplification (M1-3rd) with the construction of the superstructure.

Off-patio: Sub-Op. 4, 5, 6, 7

SOp6 and SOp7: The excavation of these two 2×2m test units to the east of M1 were intended to help define the occupational span of the structures in Patio 4 by investigating a possible midden deposit. SOp6 was excavated first at N-20/E-10. The excavation immediately encountered a great deal of artifacts; however, the soil did not appear as if to contain a high number of organic materials. The ceramic assemblage encountered in this unit pertained generally to the Late Classic period. Notably, however, there was a lack of utilitarian wares and a relatively high percentage of elite wares – even some Surlos that might indicate a late Coner date (A.D. 750-850). Intermixed with these typically Late Classic sherds, some Early Classic types were also encountered. In fact, the very uniform stratigraphy of the unit became clear as a whole host of rodent/ant tunnels were encountered. It became clear that the matrix of this unit had been thoroughly mixed by natural disturbances. Excavation reached sterile soil at 1003.00m.

Because of the mixed and disturbed nature of SOp6, it was decided to attempt another 2×2m unit nearby. SOp7 was begun 4m to the south of SOp6 – at N-24/E-10. This unit was excavated in rigorous 10cm arbitrary levels. The material culture was relatively similar – even the density of artifacts was similar. Importantly, moreover, this unit showed none of the disturbance of SOp6. In this unit, however, there was a large portion of utilitarian vessels. In the last levels before reaching sterile, the assemblage had changed from a typical Late Classic to more Acbi/Coner transitional types that might indicate a ca. A.D. 600 presence. Excavation terminated at 1002.90m, upon reaching the sterile layer.

SOp4 and SOp5: Excavation of these two contiguous sub-operations opened a 4×4m area – (N-30 to N-26 and E-20 to E-16) to the south of M2 of Patio 4. While excavation had shown some interesting chronological tendencies in the middens of M1, excavation behind M2 at first collected typically Late Classic sherds. However, within the first 20cm of SOp4, a very badly eroded figurine mold and a figurine fragment were recovered. The mold represented the first evidence of local figurine production in the Copán rural area. Neither of these units exhibited deep midden deposits – within 50cm, the sterile layer at 1002.70m was reached. No obvious functional or assemblage differences could be discerned between the deposits of M1 and M2 – although the density of material was much higher than that behind M2.

Conclusion

The excavations of Patio 4 were extremely informative about the developmental sequence of a domestic structure. While the degree of change from phase to phase remained relatively modest, the number of alterations in all was somewhat surprising. The pace of change appears even more frenetic if the chronological information from this site is considered. The vast majority of the ceramics date to the Late Classic period – there are almost no earlier ceramics coming from this patio. Unlike Patio 2 and more like Patio 1, Patio 4 seems to represent a relatively late group undergoing modifications and amplifications typical of those necessitated by a growing family group. The architectural changes evident relate to the size of the group rather than to stylistic changes that might index the group's status or wealth.

Finally, evidence for figurine-production was also found associated with this patio group. A figurine mold was encountered in the midden deposit to the south of M2.

Excavations of S-32, Off-Site

Sub-Op. 2, 3

Excavation of these two units ca. 30m west of the site was an attempt to establish the nature of a flat and well-drained area near El Raizal. To the east, El Raizal is delimited by a sharp 1m terrace drop. To the south it is limited by a sharp rise in the terrain, and to the north, the terrain becomes progressively more water-logged. To the west, however, the terrain is high, drained, and flat and yet little evidence of construction can bee seen. These sub-operations were excavated in order to (1) determine the nature of artifact deposits in a particularly flat and empty area near the site, and (2) ascertain if the area could have structures not visible through surface observations – a hidden universe.

Excavation began in these two units in arbitrary 20cm levels. The ceramics were generally early Coner. The artifact stratum was relatively thin however, since roughly 25cm below the surface, at ca. 1000.65m, a sterile reddish-brown sedimentary layer was revealed. Excavation proceeded another 40cm in this stratum to assure its sterility. Moreover, no evidence of any structures was encountered. This evidence does **not**

resolve the issue of this particular area's use or function – especially given its primary location. Future research might involve soil testing to ascertain possible agricultural uses.

Conclusions

The excavations at S-32 were able to determine preliminarily some of the original goals of the excavations: (1) chronology, (2) architectural variability, and (3) activity areas. In general, the site does exhibit some degree of variation attributable to differences in the ancient rural inhabitants. While much remains conjectural, the chronological differences seen in the ceramic assemblages from the different patio groups does suggest that S-32 grew through a rather gradual process of accrual. S-32 does not represent a single one-time construction event. S-32 while small does exhibit enough chronological variation to suggest that Patios 1 and 2 were probably constructed before Patios 3 and 4. Moreover, variations in architectural style, differential access to certain "goods" (cut stone), and even large differences in architectural size and complexity suggest socio-economic and functional distinctions between the various patios. Finally, in terms of activities associated with structures, no particular activity areas were in fact found. However, the specific analysis of the composition of the multiple refuse deposits excavated will help determine general differences that might, in turn, relate to the architectural and temporal distinctions already recognized.

Excavation of S-33, El Raizal (Objective 4)

Introduction

Excavation of this site 150m to the northwest of S-32 was intended to provide some complementary data for the El Raizal excavations. Spatially and morphologically this site showed clear similarities to the more prominent patios of S-32, and an analysis of the chronological and functional attributes of this site in comparison with those for S-32 was deemed fruitful. Specifically, certain theories concerning the relatively shallow occupational history of rural sites – the households of the "humblest" Maya – were deemed testable and verifiable through an in-depth excavation of such a site. Moreover, the analysis of this particular site was especially important as a prelude to a wider regional sampling program that will help provide even more information on the nature of residential settlement in the rural areas.

The excavation of the four main structures composing the S-33-patio, therefore, had the following goals: (1) determination of the chronology of this site, especially in regards to the Early Classic finds from S-32, (2) analysis of the architectural style and construction of this patio in relation to the larger constructions of S-32, and (3) an analysis of the breadth of variation of this site's artifactual assemblage especially in comparison to that found with S-32.

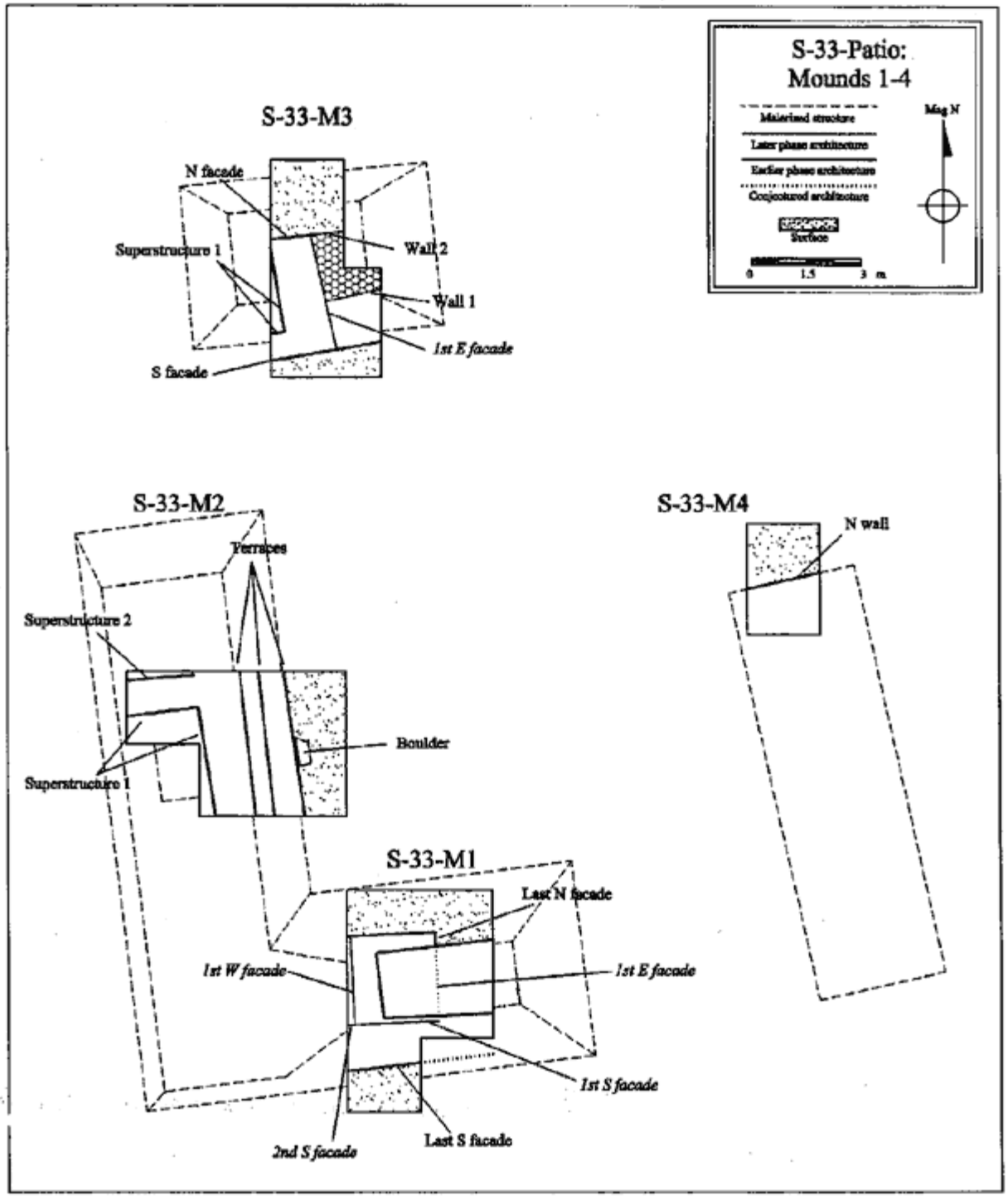

Figure 15: S-33 Patio: Mounds 1-4.

Patio (Figure 15)

Mound 1: Sub-Op. 3

Excavations of the southern structure of this patio proved the most challenging. This structure exhibited the most complex construction sequence of S-33, and thereby helped support a prolonged chronology for the site. A 6×4m (N74 to N80 and E-94 to E-98) trench was excavated along the central north south axis of the structure. To the north of the structure, the patio surface was found at roughly 999.40m. This elevation was a bit higher than the surface level found in other contexts – this difference might relate to the irregularity of the natural terrain upon which the S-33 structures were built.

In the northern section of the trench, excavation revealed a wall running east west along the N79 gridline. This wall consisted of several very large cobbles in the lower courses, and then a set of small ones in the upper portion of the wall. Given its size and extent, the wall was recognized as the northern facade of the M1-platform. Curiously, however, from the western edge of the excavation unit to the middle of the excavation trench, the lower courses of this wall jutted out by about 30cm from the wall line defined by the upper rows. From the midpoint of the trench to the eastern edge of the unit, the lowest course of this wall was flush with the upper rows. This asymmetrical feature of the north facade was the first indication that the platform was constructed in multiple stages – a fact that became clear only with the excavations in the southern end of the excavation unit.

In the southern part of the trench, excavation encountered two walls running east west along the N76.5 and N75 gridlines. Both walls were constructed of relatively rough and irregular cobbles. It became clear that the southernmost wall was the southern facade of the M1-platform – it rested on a compact earthen layer at elevation 999.80m. The other wall (at N76.5) represented the southern facade of an earlier version of the M1-platform (M1-1st-platform) – its lowest course rested on an earthen level at elevation 999.50m. Curiously the lack of an equivalent second northern facade suggested that the M1-platform had been widened southward only.

Close inspection of the M1-1st-platform southern facade proved that the M1-platform had undergone three, rather than two, construction phases. Along this earlier facade, a vertical alignment of cobbles in the rows of the wall at E-93.60 gridline clearly showed that the wall was first constructed to the east of the gridline, and then extended to the west of the E-93.60 gridline in a second construction phase before it was completely buried in a third and final stage of construction as the platform was extended southward. In fact, the original western facade of the M1-1st platform was uncovered running north south along the E-93.6 gridline. This west facade wall seemed to terminate and corner with the lower course of the northern facade of M1-3rd. The southern facade of M1-1st did not extend across the full east west breadth of the trench – it terminated at the E-91.30 gridline. Coincidentally, the portion of the north facade that jutted out terminated

at the E-91.50 gridline. The fact that the eastern limit of both the south facade of M1-1st and the protrusion of the north facade of M1-3rd coincide suggested that those two walls cornered with the eastern facade of M1-1st which was eventually buried by the amplification of the platform to the south and east.

Therefore, the discoveries of the west and south facades of M1-1st, the fact that both the southern facade of M1-1st platform and the large cobbles jutting out from the north facade of M1-3rd platform terminate at the same E-gridline all suggest that M1-1st platform was a relatively small 2.5×2.5m square platform. M1-1st platform was then expanded to the west probably connecting it architecturally with the M2-platform. In so doing, the M1-1st west facade was buried. At yet a later stage, M1-2nd was expanded to both the east and south. In so doing, new southern and eastern facades were constructed, burying their antecedents. The northern facade was simply added to or modified – even heightened between M1-2nd and M1-3rd with the rows of smaller cobbles overlying the original courses of larger cobbles.

On the summit of the M1-platform a small north south wall (summit wall) was encountered running along the E-93 gridline – it was located 40cm to the east of the buried western facade of M1-1st. It appears that in the final phase of construction, the M1-platform was not only expanded south and eastward, but it was also heightened and leveled. In fact, small hand-sized cobbles would represent the easiest and simplest construction material in order to heighten and then even out an irregular wall and surface. Therefore, the small cobble summit wall cornered with the upper rows of the north facade to create an even and flat surface to the south of the northern facade and east of this small summit wall – distributed throughout this area, a great deal of bajareque fragments were found, evidencing the presence of a superstructure on this prepared surface.

Mound 2: Sub-Op. 1

The excavation of this structure was located along the east west centerline of the mound. A trench excavation exposed the mound from the patio surface to its summit. The trench measured 4×6m (N82 to N86 and E-92 to E-98). Excavation revealed a compact surface at roughly 999.20m to the east of the M2 structure.

Resting on this level, the lowest of three walls (lower east terrace) was encountered running north south along the E-96 line. 50cm to the west of this first wall a second one (middle east terrace) was uncovered at elevation 999.60m. 25cm to the west of this second wall, the third wall (upper east terrace) was found at elevation 1000.00m. Each of these three terraces consisted of irregularly shaped cobbles that were aligned very roughly. Moreover, each terrace was only one cobble row high. The construction technique of these walls was very poor and simple. In fact, they were in a very poor state of preservation, especially since the cobbles used to construct them did not fit together very well.

Because these three walls extended the full north south exposure of the excavation unit, they were considered to be terraces instead of localized simple steps. However, they

most probably functioned as steps leading from the patio surface to the M2-platform summit. Abutting the lower east terrace, a large boulder (50×20cm) was located (at N84.5/E-95) resting on the same surface upon which the lower terrace was built. This cobble did not appear to have fallen from the summit, and was interpreted to have been a rustic bench located on the patio – perhaps the local of specific activities. Artifact analysis of this area will consider this possibility.

The summit of the M2-platform was located at elevation 1000.05m. On this summit, the walls of two distinct superstructures were located consisting of smaller more tightly packed cobbles. Of Superstructure 1, the eastern and northern facades were located, while of Superstructure 2 only the southern facade was revealed. At first, the northern facade of Superstructure 1 and the southern facade of Superstructure 2 were thought to be the two sides of a doorway into a larger superstructure. However, both facades extended 80cm to the west – a length too long for a doorway. It thus became clear that M2 had flanking superstructures.

An excavation probe in-between the two superstructures was undertaken in order to locate any evidence of previous construction phases. Excavation in this probe encountered a sterile layer at roughly 999.50m. Interestingly, the patio level was found at 999.20m. It became clear that (1) this particular segment of M2 did not rest above an earlier, and (2) the mound was constructed on a natural rise – most probably, a segment of a natural rise of the terrain was surfaced and terraced. In fact, M2 had no "back" side – the terrain naturally rose from the level of the superstructures.

Mound 3: Sub-Op. 4

Excavation of this structure opened a 6×5m trench (N94 to N100 and E-96 to E-93) that was thought to be the center line of the northern structure of this patio group. At roughly 999.15m the same packed earthen surface was revealed to the south of the main architecture. As excavation progressed on or near the structure, three walls were found in rapid succession that quickly provided a preliminary outline of this structure.

To the south of the mound, resting on this surface and running east west on the N94.75 gridline a cobble wall was encountered. This wall consisted of irregularly shaped cobbles – a mixture of large and small – that was stacked 4 courses high. It was clear that this wall represented the southern facade of the M4-platform. To the north of the south facade, excavation also encountered at N98 line another cobble wall running east west across the excavation area. This wall was composed of smaller cobbles, more tightly packed, and of a relatively consistent size. This wall was clearly the northern facade of the M3-platform. Interestingly, the northern facade descended to an elevation of 998.90m – 30cm **below** the level of the southern facade. These two cobble walls exhibited the same rustic style of composition found in the rest of the structures of this patio group.

Excavation in between the northern and southern facades of the M4-platform revealed another cobble wall on summit of the M3-platform. This cobble wall ran perpendicular to both north and south facades and consisted of three rows of small well-packed rounded

evenly sized cobbles. In fact, this wall was very similar to the superstructure walls of M2. This wall was most probably the eastern facade of the M3-superstructure.

A close inspection of both the northern and southern facades of the M3-platform showed that they were both built in two stages. Both had a vertical alignment of the cobbles in their rows – suggesting that the facades had been at one point extended from the E-94.2 gridline. Moreover, the patterns in both facades suggested that the original platform was extended to the east of the E-94.2 gridline. Excavation along the E-94.2 gridline between the southern and northern facades exposed another north south cobble wall that corresponded directly to the vertical alignments in the both facades of the platform. This new wall was evidently the original eastern facade of the M3-platform before it was expanded eastward. Excavation showed that this wall rested on a surface at the elevation of 999.00m – the same level on which the back (north) facade of M3 rested. The discovery of an earlier eastern facade of the M3-platform did suggest that the occupational span of this patio group was somewhat more complicated and enduring than originally assumed.

However, the greater surprise involved the discovery of two walls (W1 and W2) that abutted the original eastern facade of the M3-platform. These walls were constructed much like the northern facade of M3-platform – tightly spaced small rounded cobbles. These walls were subsequently buried and cancelled by the expansion of the M3-platform. However, before they were cancelled, it appears that W1, W2, and the early eastern facade defined a small "room" attached to eastern facade of the M3-early-platform. Moreover, all three walls (W1, W2, and the eastern facade of M3-early-platform) rested on a 999.00m elevation. At this elevation moreover, a very even and well-surfaced cobble flooring was found extending over the area within these walls. To the south of W1 and to the north of W2, this floor was not encountered. Excavation below this surface revealed sterile strata.

In summary, M3 was clearly constructed in stages. The main platform was first complemented by an abutting room-enclosure with a floor, and then it was expanded to the east, burying the room and extending the M3-platform summit to the east.

Mound 4: Sub-Op. 2

A 2×3m unit (N88 to N90 and E-83 to E-80) was placed along the northern limit of this structure. Excavation exposed the northern facade of the M4 structure. Excavation proceeded to an elevation of 998.82m to the north of the north facade wall to find a compact earthen surface that, like in S-32, represented the rough patio surface.

The north facade wall consists of rough cobbles, in part disturbed by what appears to be a modern drainage ditch to the east of S-33. The cobble masonry of this wall is extremely rustic – many of the cobbles are not faced, and the wall is composed of many different sizes of cobbles very distinct from the relatively well-packed cobble masonry of S-32.

Conclusions

Excavation of the S-33 site provided a wealth of comparative data for S-32. While certain obvious similarities were made evident by these excavations, some interesting differences were also encountered.

First, the architecture of S-33 was definitely simpler and coarser than that found at S-32. There was a complete lack of cut stone, and the individual structures were mostly composed of irregular cobble walls that did not represent the same labor intensity of some of the finer constructions of S-32. In fact, the ancillary structures to the north of Patio 1 (M16 and M17) of S-32 most closely resemble those of S-33. Second, the ceramic assemblage of the site contained neither Early Classic nor Terminal Classic evidence. It appears that this site was functioning throughout the early Coner only. Third, the architectural modifications and alterations of the site suggested that the site was not the product of a single construction phase with a short occupation. The multiple additions and connections made to all the mounds suggests that the site was the locus of human activity for perhaps more than a single generation.

More informative and detailed analysis of the artifacts from the midden contexts excavated behind the structures will have to await laboratory analysis.

Final Summary

Chronology

El Raizal sites excavated reached its cultural apogee in the early Late Classic – roughly A.D. 650-750. In excavations, the Copador type represented the most numerous of the elite ceramic types. A great deal of ceramics from pre-Coner contexts (mostly Acbi) was also found. These Acbi sherds appear to be mostly of the utilitarian types, and may reflect the more domestic and subsistence-related nature of the site in an earlier period. However, the majority (65%) of the ceramics relates to the early Coner period, of which a substantial part are elite wares. Furthermore, at first glance, it appears that the ceramic types and forms characteristic of late Coner (A.D. 750-900) period constitute only a minor part of the ceramics – a fact that suggests a decline in activity at this site that began in the second half of the eighth century A.D.

Apart from the early Coner period preponderance among ceramics, there were encountered an enigmatic amount of Preclassic elite ceramics – specifically of the Izalco Izalco variety. The possible Chabij/Bijac element of El Raizal can be explained preliminarily as evidence of either (1) a continuous occupational span from the Late Preclassic to the Late Classic the intensity of which fluctuated greatly through time, or (2) of two separate occupational periods, the first terminating in the Bijac period and the second beginning in Late Acbi.

Function/Role

Clearly, the possible function of the settlement concentration is very closely related to the occupational sequence of the site. However, some conclusions concerning the role of this site can be proposed without having to ascertain the precise nature of the site's occupational span. If it can be assumed that there did exist a Preclassic occupation at the site, one could interpret the center as having originally been a small residence that over time developed into a relatively important center for the modest rural populations that would have grown up around it. Moreover, such an early occupation of El Raizal would imply that these rural residential centers did not result directly from the founding of dynastic Copán. The fact that El Raizal was founded in the Bijac period – possibly centuries before the beginning of the Copán dynasty – suggests that the rural areas of Copán had their own independent cultural sequence. In other words, the discovery of these early ceramics inaugurates a discussion of pre-dynastic cultural development in the rural areas, a period of time during which, it had been previously thought, this rural region was generally devoid of human settlement and activity. The findings from this season and previous ones (cf. Canuto 1997) roundly contradict this simplistic view. The hypothesized pre-dynastic phase of occupation at El Raizal represents an independent development from the contemporaneous developments of settlement in the Copán valley.

The Acbi and early Coner phases also play a crucial role in the understanding of Copán's development. While the influence and power of Copán throughout this region cannot be refuted, a debate on the nature and chronology of this influence has in fact arisen. While previous chronologies (cf. Webster and Freter 1990) have claimed a post-dynastic settlement of these rural areas, the staunch presence of Acbi contexts suggests that some rural populations may have been the result of a much more precocious Copanec control of these outlying areas than had originally been thought. In fact, models (cf. Marcus 1993) that claim a reduction of Copán's control of its immediate area throughout the Classic period would, in fact, call for sites of the rural areas to be established early and to decline even before the final collapse of the dynastic center – a pattern preliminarily suggested by the El Raizal data.

Architecture

The El Raizal area exhibits an extremely rustic form of architecture as is characterized by the fact that it also almost completely lacks several architectural traits typical of the Copán valley: (1) cut stone masonry, (2) plaster floors, (3) stuccoed facades, and (4) sculpture. Despite these differences, the architecture of El Raizal is still derived from a general template recognizable in the architecture of the Copán valley. The earthen constructions of Los Achiotes (Canuto 1997), therefore, remain still somewhat of an anomaly, although the possible earthen mound under M9 of El Raizal may in fact relate back to the same period as Los Achiotes.

The structures of El Raizal consisted of a dry fill composed of dirt, cobble, and artifacts. The majority of the walls are composed of medium-sized cobbles that come directly from the nearby creek bed. Even the tallest structure (M9; 3.5m) was constructed with cobble masonry, and no stucco. Moreover, the access to the summit of this structure was via outset stairs made up of cobbles and earth. Only one structure (M7) consisted, in part, of cut-stone masonry. Moreover, none of the excavated structures had any evidence of plaster. The S-33 structures were constructed with even cruder methods and materials than those of El Raizal. Moreover, none of the patios excavated exhibited any sign of having been surfaced. While very localized areas (inner rooms) were generally paved with small flat cobbles, all the patio floors must have all been simple compacted earth surfaces.

The majority of the investigated mounds had perishable superstructures. Possibly M7 had a superstructure constructed in part with stone and then the rest in perishable material. The superstructure of M1 also appears to have been mostly stone – curiously, this mound pertains to a patio group that represents probably the latest construction at the site. Furthermore, the cut-stone terrace/bench that abuts the southern facade of M7 was constructed in M7's last phase. Perhaps, in the later stages of the site development, stone-masonry became a more potent symbol of status and wealth.

In summary, it can be concluded that the architecture of the site mostly represents a functional use of locally available resources. Only in its later phases is there evidence that architectural style and material could be used not for strictly functional but more symbolic purposes. In fact, before the last phase at the site, it is assumed that the only major difference between the individual structures was their size and specific function. However, in the last phase of the site the architectural differences increase along a more strict socio-economic scale where the sites around El Raizal exhibit very rustic architecture, while at El Raizal some of the structures have some cut stone masonry.

Production

In the preliminary study of the artifacts collected from the excavations, some provisional conclusions could be suggested. In terms of ceramics – apart from chronological questions – it is clear that a predominance of Coner ceramics were recovered. Freter (1988) maintains that the common Zico group of Coner ceramics is absent in the eastern rural regions. At El Raizal, however, all the different Zico types were in fact found. Interestingly, the Zico ceramics from this area were quite similar to those from the Copán area – although in some cases the paste was softer than that of the Copán valley Zico types. These finds suggest that even at the level of basic utilitarian vessels, the Copán influence in this area was palatable. Moreover, analysis of these wares will hopefully determine whether the rural Zico types are imitations of the Copán wares with locally available equivalent clay, or if they are in fact the same vessels manufactured in the Copán valley. The sourcing of these rural utilitarian wares will help determine the nature of center-periphery trade systems. The elite ceramics of El Raizal, however, are clearly identical to those of the Copán valley – a fact that suggests a direct importation

of elite goods from Copán. These ceramics will also be sourced for comparative purposes.

In terms of lithic production, evidence of local production far outweighed that of importation. The spent core recovered from S-44, and the various partial cores from the excavations at S-32 and S-33, as well as the numerous pieces of obsidian shatter with cortex all suggest that the obsidian tools used at these sites were locally manufactured. In terms of lithics, the evidence unequivocally points toward an exchange of raw materials rather than finished products. It will be interesting to compare this evidence with that of the ceramics in order to ascertain the nature of local ceramic production as well. The two lance points recovered, however, were not locally made. In fact, they were not made in the southeastern area (Braswell, 1998, pers. comm.). These two artifacts as well as the jade pendant represent the connection El Raizal must have had with a more far-flung elite exchange network.

Very little in the way of bones, teeth, or shell artifacts were encountered. Two deer bones were recovered in the lowest levels of the M7 probe excavations.

In conclusion, it is possible to stipulate that the site of El Raizal consisted of a series of nuclear families surrounding the residence of a relatively wealthy extended family. It probably contained its own ceramic and lithic experts, although the majority of the inhabitants were primarily farmers.

Final Words

In this initial phase of research, the following conclusions can be considered neither fixed nor complete. In fact, they merely represent possibilities not contradicted by evidence thus far gathered. Notwithstanding the peril involved with premature conclusions, some general suppositions have been offered that will demand future confirmation through laboratory and artifact analysis.

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