Part I: Further Investigations within Coastal-Oriented Transect 5
Chapter 2

Riverside Residential Midden at the Samuel Oshon Site (Operation 25)

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Operation 25 was positioned near the northwest corner of Structure 424, a relatively small platform situated about 7 m from a high bank of the Sibun River. The singular platform structure appears as a satellite mound separate from the site center of Oshon, located roughly 200 m northwest of Group A. Creation of a schematic planview of the platform revealed the presence of two smaller platforms that abutted the eastern and western sides of the main structure (Figure 2.1). The two platform extensions create inset corners on either side of the structure, perhaps functioning as small kitchen, storage, and/or work areas associated with the main platform structure.

Previous investigations at Oshon (Morandi and Thomas 2001; Harrison 2003) had focused on structures located in the main plaza of the Oshon site. Investigations during the 2003 season shifted the focus to a small, riverside platform (presumably residential) in order to gain insight into a non-elite context at the site. The excavation of Structure 424 aimed to clarify the techniques of platform construction and to glean a sample of occupational debris from the residence to better understand the range of domestic activities.

To quickly isolate midden debris associated with the residence, a series of fifteen shovel test-pits (STPs) were carried out on the western side of the structure (refer to Figure 2.1). STPs 11, 12, 14, and 15 encountered a more compact matrix than other test-pits, possibly representing the remains of the western platform extension. Spikes in artifact densities were especially noticeable in the vicinity of one of the inset corners created by the western platform extension, close to the northwest corner of Structure 424. Of the fifteen total STPs, numbers 6 and 9 held the highest density of cultural material. Operation 25, a 2 x 2 m excavation unit, encompassed both STPs in an effort to expose the densest portion of the trash deposit associated with the west side of Structure 424. The excavation was divided into two 1 x 2 m squares (A and B). STP 9 was within Square B in the center of the southern edge of the square. STP 6 was within the center of Square A, along the northern edge of the unit. Due to time constraints, only Square B was excavated during the 2003 season.

Excavations revealed a rich midden deposit, presumably refuse from activities taking place on the main structure and western platform extension. The significantly high density of lithic and obsidian material that was recovered from the excavation appeared clearly to exceed the needs of a single household, suggesting that some level of workshop production was carried out in this locale. The following details these and other finds from Zones 1-6 that were excavated in Operation 25 from Square B.

Overview of Operation 25

Zone 1

As mentioned above, Square B is a 1 m (east-west) x 2 m (north-south) unit located along the western side of Structure 424, near the northwest corner. Excavation of Zone 1 removed the topsoil of Square B, roughly 20 cm in depth. The matrix included about 10 cm of clay-filled alluvium directly beneath a 10 cm
thick humic layer. Only 50% of all sediment was screened due to the general paucity of artifactual material recorded in the topzone of the operation and within all fifteen STPs dug in and around Operation 25. A light density of cultural material was recovered. Notably, several porcelain colonial period sherds were recovered, along with three obsidian blade fragments.

Zone 2

An earthen layer directly underneath Zone 1, Zone 2 appeared to be an alluvial deposit that likely accumulated and gradually covered the mound through repeated inundation as a result of heavy rains and periodic flooding of the nearby river. The matrix was devoid of any inclusions. Artifact density increased significantly in this zone, beginning roughly 30 cm below ground surface. A number of historical pieces of metal were recovered in Zone 2. Additionally, a large quantity of obsidian (N = 13) was found, along with a relatively high density of chert cores, flakes, and debitage, indicative of all phases of tool production. Artifact density appeared higher in the eastern half of the square, nearest to Structure 424, nearest to where a metate fragment also was found. A flotation sample (15 liters) was taken of the general matrix of Zone 2.
At the base of the zone, a significantly darker and more compact artifact-filled matrix was encountered. The midden-rich area was designated Zone 3 and may represent a living surface partially covered by heaps of trash debris.

Zone 3

A midden-rich deposit that encompassed most of Square B (Figure 2.2), the Zone 3 matrix was significantly darker and contained more artifacts than Zone 2. Common artifacts included ceramic sherds and lithic debris, with flecks of charcoal throughout the matrix. Very few rocks were present. Only a few tiny limestone and conglomerate inclusions, along with two or three gravel-sized river stones were noted. The midden deposit was heaped against the northwest corner of Structure 424. The structure was built with a very compact clayey matrix with no evidence of stone masonry.

![Figure 2.2. East and south wall cross-sections showing the midden in relation to Structure 424 (drawn and inked by E. Harrison-Buck).](image)

Artifact density remained high in Zone 3. Several chipped stone tool fragments were found in this zone. Four reconstructible metate fragments also were collected, as well as one larger stone that may be a fragment of a different metate. A total of 32 obsidian fragments were recovered from Zone 3, including a few points. In the heart of the midden, two flotation samples were collected (10 and 15 Liters total) from which two 1L bags were sub-sampled for both pollen and phytolith analysis.

Zone 4

A 1 x 1 m area that was in the vicinity of STP 9, Zone 4 was excavated only in the eastern half of Square B (Figure 2.2). The zone comprised a compact earthen layer that resembled Zone 3 in color. Artifact density remained high in this zone and included obsidian, debitage, and ceramics. However, the obsidian density was much lower (9 pieces) in comparison to Zone 3 and the quantity of debitage was also less. A few diagnostic sherds were found, including rim pieces and slipped fragments. A discrete dark area in the northwest corner of the unit yielded a C-14 sample, while another larger sample was collected from the bottom of Zone 4 in the southeast corner of the unit. Small flecks of charcoal were noted throughout the matrix, and larger pieces found in the screen were collected as archaeobotanical samples. About twenty small pieces of fire-cracked rock were noted in the screen, but not collected. During the excavation of
Zones 3 and 4, the northwest corner of Structure 424 was defined in the southeast corner of the unit and was designated Zone 5 (see below). Zone 4 terminated at a more compact level, which resembled Zone 5 in texture and color, and may represent an outside patio surface (Zone 6).

Zone 5

Zone 5 consisted of the remains of Structure 424, a packed earthen mound with no signs of facing stones or other inclusions associated with its construction (see Figure 2.2). The Zone 5 matrix, a very compact clay construction fill (10 YR 4/6), was defined but not excavated during 2003. It consisted of a very compact clay construction fill (10YR 4/6). The portion of the mound that was exposed had a top elevation of roughly 132 cm below the datum and a bottom elevation of around 179 cm below the datum.

Zone 6

An outside patio floor of compacted earth, Zone 6 appears to have been informally prepared with no remains of plaster. The zone still measured roughly 1 x 1 m in area within the eastern half of Square B. Only a small area in the southeast corner of the square was not excavated in Zone 6. This was the location of Structure 424. The packed floor of Zone 6 abuts Structure 424 in a sloping fashion. The contact between the structure and the patio floor were indistinguishable, as both comprised of a compact clayey matrix with little to no stone. As Zones 4 and 6 were taken down, a portion of the compact earthen fill where the structure and the floor come together was excavated.

The midden debris was found heaped on the floor and against the western side of Structure 424 (Figure 2.2). This contact was clearly discernable—the midden was a darker, organic-rich color. Although charcoal flecks were found throughout the zone, the Zone 6 matrix did not contain the same high concentration as that of Zone 4. Larger chunks of charcoal were removed as C-14 samples, while others were collected as archaeobotanical remains. In general, the artifact density was much lower than in the overlaying Zone 4. Obsidian fragments were very small and few in number (N=5). Diagnostic sherds were found, including several ring bases. The density of fire-cracked rock also was significantly lower. Zone 6 was removed to the level at which STP 9 bottoms out.

Zone 7

A posthole probe of basal deposits, Zone 7 measures about 25 cm wide and 60 cm in depth. It was placed in the center of the 1 x 1 m area in the eastern half of Square B (Figure 2.3). Although removed as one zone, the dirt was excavated in 20 cm increments to monitor any fluctuations in the artifact density. The first 20 cm yielded two small, eroded sherds and a piece of microdebitage. While the following 20 cm yielded a single piece of microdebitage, the next 20 cm lacked any cultural material. The 60 cm of sediment from the posthole probe was consistent in color (10YR 4/6). However, Zone 6 was more compact than Zone 7, suggesting its possible function as a packed floor surface. Excavations ceased at this level for Zone 7 appeared to be an alluvial deposit that was culturally sterile.
Figure 2.3. West and north wall cross-sections showing the posthole probe at the base of the unit (drawn and inked by E. Harrison-Buck).

References Cited

Harrison, Eleanor

Morandi, Steven and Ben Thomas
Chapter 3
Circular Shrine at the Augustine Obispo Site (Operation 32)

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The Augustine Obispo site is located in the lower reaches of the Sibun Valley in Transect 5. The site is situated on the southern side of the Sibun River, about 5km from Oshon—the largest site in the lower reaches of the valley (see Harrison and King, chapter 2). The Obispo site (Figure 3.1) consists of a main plaza group that contains at least five platform structures (Structures 475, 476, 480, 479, and 482) that were mapped during the 1999 field season (Morandi and Norris 2001; see also Thomas and Secchiaroli 2001). The largest mound, Structure 475, was the focus of an excavation (Operation 31) carried out during the 2001 field season (Morandi 2003). Excavations revealed a masonry façade of large cut limestone blocks and the eastern wall of a centrally located, outset staircase leading to the top of the high platform. Midden debris associated with Structure 475 appeared to date primarily to the Late to Terminal Classic period.

During survey in 1999, two groups of stone monuments were identified within the main plaza at Obispo; one associated with Structure 479 and the other with Structure 480. An excavation in 2001 (Operation 30) investigated the monument complex just to the north of Structure 480 (Morandi 2003). The excavation revealed large fragments of an uncarved altar with high densities of incense burner fragments found on and around the broken monument that appeared to date from the Terminal Classic to Postclassic periods (López Varella 2003; see also López Varella, Chapter 14).

During the 2003 field season, the primary goal of excavation at Obispo was to continue to investigate parts of the main plaza area. Further investigation of the highest platform, Structure 475, revealed an elite burial positioned at the top of the main outset staircase along the structure’s central axis. This excavation (Operation 33) is discussed in the following chapter (see Hall, Chapter 4). In addition, Operation 32 at Obispo exposed an area of the plaza where a second stone monument was situated, along with a large section of Structure 479, an all-stone circular building.

Operation 32, discussed herein, was oriented on a cardinal axis and measured 9 m (east-west) x 6 m (north-south). The unit covered just over half of the northwestern side of Structure 479 (Figure 3.2). The unit was divided into six squares (A-F), each measuring 3 x 3 m (Figure 3.3). All squares were superimposed over a portion of the structure. Only Squares A, B, D, and E were excavated during the 2003 season and the size of Square B was reduced due to an intrusive avocado tree. Square A contained only a small section of the circular structure. Together, the four squares revealed slightly less than half of the round structure that measured roughly 9 meters in total diameter. Square E was superimposed over the top portion of the mound and exposed a large area of the interior room of Structure 479. Squares A, B, and D revealed the exterior of Structure 479 and portions of the surrounding plaza area to the north and west of the structure. Just west of the central doorway of Structure 479 a large fragment of a stela was situated at the interface of Squares A and D. The monument fragment had fallen and did not appear to be in its original location (Figure 3.4).

Previous investigations in the Sibun Valley at the sites of Pechtun Ha and Oshon uncovered two other circular structures with multiple construction sequences that were strikingly similar to one another in construction technique and style (Harrison 2001 and 2003). These all-stone structures were quite similar.
Figure 3.1. Map of the main plaza at Obispo showing the location of Operations 30-33 (mapped by S. Morandi et al. 1999:Map Sheet 13 and adapted by E. Harrison-Buck).

Both were associated with stone monuments and a high density of marine shell was found on and around these buildings. Each building was constructed with a plinth or step surrounding the outer perimeter of a one-room superstructure. In both cases, the interior room was later in-filled and transformed into a platform structure.

Excavations of Operation 32 aimed to 1) further investigate the presence of circular architecture in the Sibun Valley 2) compare patterns in construction techniques and architectural style across space and time and 3) clarify the overall chronology of the main plaza at Obispo. The following provides a review of the construction phases that were identified during the 2003 excavation of Operation 32. A detailed description of the individual zones defined in each square follows an overview of the excavation techniques that were utilized during excavation.
Construction Phases

Operation 32 revealed three major construction episodes (Phases 1-3) that were further subdivided into Phases 1a and 1b, Phases 2a and 2b, and Phase 3, which were defined based on the appearance of minor architectural modifications. The following provides an overview of each architectural phase.

Phase 1

Phase 1a comprised the initial building of a low circular platform, referred to a Substructure 479 that was associated with a packed earthen floor (Plaza Floor 3). The two-course high wall of Substructure 479 was built of large, roughly cut limestone blocks and the fill of the low platform consisted of a mix of limestone and chert cobbles. A small portion of an earthen mound (Structure 482) was identified in the northeast corner of Operation 32 in Square B that also was associated with Plaza Floor 3. Additionally, a line of three stones, two-courses high running roughly north-south was revealed in the southwest corner of the excavation unit (Square D) that appeared to have been built during Phase 1a. The portion of the wall rested on Plaza Floor 3 and abutted the southern edge of the circular platform. The wall construction was associated with Substructure 479, but its function could not be discerned due to limited horizontal exposure. During Phase 1b, another plaza floor (Plaza Floor 2) with a 15-20 cm thick fill layer covered the earlier plaza floor and the first course of stone on Substructure 479. This second plaza floor also was associated with Substructure 479 and Structure 482, as well as the corner of a one-course high wall identified in the
Figure 3.3. Planview of Operation 32, showing features of and Plaza Floor 1 and Structure 479 during Phase 2 (drawn and inked by E. Harrison-Buck).

Figure 3.4. Cross-section of stela fragment, looking north.
southwest corner of the unit in Square D. This low wall appeared to be part of another structure to the south of Substructure 479, but cornered south into the wall of Square D and continued outside the limits of excavation.

Phase 2

During Phase 2a, Substructure 479 was entirely covered over by another floor (Plaza Floor 1) and the low-walled superstructure of Structure 479 with its interior room was constructed overtop. The new plaza floor did not appear to run underneath Structure 479, but a separate floor (Interior Floor 1) was built inside the room of Structure 479. Thus, the new plaza floor and the superstructure of Structure 479 seem to have been built at the same time during the initial part of Phase 2. During this phase, a trash pit was dug into Plaza Floor 1 and intruded into the two earlier floors. The midden pit was located just to the north of Structure 479 in Square B, in the northeast corner of the excavation unit. Subsequently, a plinth or low step was added to the outside of the superstructure during Phase 2b. Continued use of the midden pit throughout the site’s history is possible considering the quantity of debris that was heaped overtop of the pit feature. At this time, the interior room floor of Structure 479 was resurfaced. A thick floor covered almost the entire first course of the interior wall of the superstructure and ramped down through the doorway and merged with the existing Plaza Floor 3 that continued to be used throughout Phase 2 and into Phase 3.

Phase 3

During Phase 3, the interior room was in-filled with large limestone slabs and recycled stone material and transformed into a platform structure. The fill mostly comprised large limestone slabs that were positioned upright in the loose fill. The finely cut doorjamb stones of the superstructure were dismantled and used to block the doorway entrance. This makeshift retaining retained what appeared to be a haphazard and expedient in-filling job. The large quantity of recycled stones appear to have been robbed from other buildings at the site, suggesting a period of decline at the site. Surface preservation was poor, but some of the reused stone may have functioned as terracing on the newly formed platform surface. At this time, the stone monument seems to have been moved and re-positioned around the front of the structure’s doorway.

Excavation Techniques

In an effort to glean a maximum level of information, one hundred percent of all soil excavated was screened through a quarter-inch screen. At least one 30-liter soil sample was removed from each zone for water flotation carried out in the field lab. More intensive soil sampling was conducted on organic-rich deposits, such as the midden deposit that was identified in Square B. During excavation trowels were primarily used, with picks and shovels being used infrequently to remove dirt and large stones from areas of heavier overburden, such as the large quantity of construction fill that in-filled the interior room as part of Phase 3. Trowels (and dental tools when necessary) were utilized to define the surface of architecture and in situ deposits. Excavation removed levels of sediment in the context of defined zones within the individual squares that measured 3 x 3 m. Any changes in zone size are noted in the zone descriptions. Any links in construction sequences between zones are indicated in the descriptions and through their phase designations. Two datums were used throughout excavations. Datum 1 was used for all elevation measurements for Squares A and B and Datum 2 was used for elevation measurements in Squares D and E. The following provides the details of excavation by zone, grouped together by construction episode beginning with the latest architectural phase.
Phase 3

Zone 1

Zone 1 consisted of a thin layer of topsoil covering the surface of the entire operation (Squares A, B, D, and E). Considerable vegetation covered the ground surface of the operation prior to excavation. A high density of roots was encountered throughout Zone 1. In addition to an existing avocado tree in Squares B and C, numerous tree stumps and other modern disturbances were present throughout the unit. There were a number of pitted areas, likely representing past tree fall that had slightly disturbed portions of the structure. The mound also showed evidence of modern burning. High densities of charred organic material, blackened limestone, and reddened chert material were recovered throughout Zone 1. The stela fragment, partially visible on the surface, also was blackened. Excavation of Zone 1 revealed numerous ant nests that also have contributed to the disturbance of the ancient remains. Additionally, cows roamed the vicinity of the site, which was in relatively open pasture, and would graze on the mounds and sometimes enter the excavation units.

At the base of Zone 1, the top portion of the superstructure walls (Zone 20) of Structure 479 and an outer wall of a low step or plinth (Zone 19) surrounding the perimeter of the building was partially exposed. The top portion of also was exposed at the base of Zone 1. Artifact density throughout Zone 1 was generally low. There was about 20 unworked fragments of marine shell recovered from Zone 1. Only a light density of ceramics was found in the topzone. There was a high density of chert material collected, especially around the surrounding edge of the structure where a high density of collapsed stone debris was encountered toward the base of the zone. Much of the raw chert material may have been used as construction fill material. However, two large nodules found resting on the surface of the plinth were distinctive from the bulk of the material and perhaps represented raw material brought to the site for the purposes of tool production. Some of the chert collected from Zone 1 were indicative of each phase of tool production, worked in the form of cores, flakes, debitage, and chipped stone tool fragments.

Zone 2

Zone 2 was underlying the Zone 1 topsoil and consisted of tumble debris that had fallen from Structure 479. The collapsed debris was lying on the low step (Zone 19) that surrounded the structure and debris also was found within the plaza area. The collapsed debris consisted of a loose matrix with varying sized limestones. Some of the stones are cut and others were rough cobbles and pebbles that were likely collapse from the interior construction fill. Zone 2 in Square B comprised tumble only outside of the structure and Zone 5 consisted of the tumble over the plinth (Zone 19). However, Zone 2 in Square D comprised the tumble in both areas and Zone 5 consisted of a thin layer of residual tumble on the step.

At the base of Zone 2, tumble continued in the area surrounding the exterior of the structure. A nicely preserved 40 cm-high wall of the Zone 19 step was almost entirely exposed. A high frequency of large, cut limestone blocks were removed as part of the Zone 2 collapsed debris. Several areas of Operation 32 contained the remains of tree stumps that had disturbed parts of Structure 479. Artifact density gradually increased with depth. Zone 2 yielded roughly an equivalent amount of unworked marine shell (N=17).
Zone 3 was the tumble directly underneath Zone 2 and consisted of limestone and chert cobble and pebble debris collapsed from Structure 479. The matrix was similar to Zone 2, but toward the base of the zone the density of stone increased, especially the quantity of chert nodules. The artifact density increased steadily over the course of Zones 2 and 3 in Squares A, B and D. Square E encompassed a large portion of the interior room of the building and the fill inside the room was removed separately (see Zones 6, 7, and 15). A number of large metate fragments and one mano fragment were identified, point-plotted, and drawn in situ (Figure 3.3). In addition, a high density of marine shell (N=176 shell fragments) was recovered from around the plaza floor surface, in the vicinity of the doorway of Structure 479. These artifacts appeared to be associated with the latest plaza surface that was encountered at the base of Zone 3.

The latest plaza surface (Plaza Floor 1) was exposed at the bottom of Zone 3 in Squares A, B, and D, along with portions of the circular structure in Squares B, D, and E. In Squares B and D portions of the floor were relatively flat and well-constructed while other areas of the floor exposed in Squares A, B, and D were poorly preserved with a rough, undulating surface created by protruding limestone and chert cobbles. Further excavation revealed that the rough plaza floor represented the top of an earlier circular platform (Substructure 479) that ran underneath a portion of Structure 479. Although very poorly preserved, the latest plaza floor (Floor 1) covered over the earlier, two-course high circular platform. Excavations outside the earlier platform structure indicated that the surrounding plaza area was gradually built up over time to cover the earlier platform (see Zones 21-26).

Excavation of Zone 3 revealed the bottom course of stones on the exterior step (Zone 19) that post-dated the latest plaza floor, resting directly on its surface. Plaza Floor 1 appeared to have been built at the same time as the initial phase of Structure 479 (during Phase 2), following the discontinued use of Substructure 479 (Phase 1). During Phase 3, the structure was in-filled and transformed into a platform structure and the quality of construction declined significantly (see Zones 6, 7, and 15 below).

At the base of Zone 3, a rich midden deposit (Zone 4) that appeared to be entirely associated with Phase 2 occupation was exposed in Square B to the north of Structure 479. Some of this surface material was collected as part of Zone 3, but the bulk of the midden was removed separately as Zones 4 and 8 (see Phase 2a below).

Zone 5 was restricted to Squares B and D and comprised the tumble directly over a plinth (Zone 19) added to Structure 479 during a modification to the building (referred to as Phase 1b). The low step surrounded the perimeter of the (Zone 20) free-standing superstructure which represented the initial building phase of Structure 479 (Phase 1a). The thin layer of tumble was removed in an effort to define the surface of the plinth and any terminal debris lying on its surface. In Square D, some of the tumble over the step was removed as Zone 2 and the residual tumble was then taken out as Zone 5. In Square B, all tumble over the step was removed as Zone 5 and Zone 2 was restricted to the tumble north of the step. Ultimately, very few artifacts were recovered from the surface of the step. The tumble was similar to Zone 2, comprised of a rock-filled matrix that was primarily limestone.
Zone 6

Zone 6 appeared to be a mix of tumble and construction fill that effectively in-filled the interior room of Structure 479 during a final phase of construction (Phase 3). Zone 6 was restricted to an area of the interior room exposed in Squares D, E and a small part of B. Zone 6 was primarily located in Square E due to its relative position over a large area of the interior of the room of Structure 479. The interior room fill was differentiated from the overlying tumble by the presence of sizeable limestone blocks placed upright in the matrix. These large, upright stones and surrounding fill were removed as Zone 7. A light density of artifacts were recovered from all three squares, with slightly more found in Square E due to its size. Zone 6 yielded about 23 shells and two small speleothems positioned in and around the doorway of Structure 479. At the base of the zone the top portion of the interior wall construction of Structure 479 was exposed.

Zone 7

Zone 7 comprised more of the construction fill inside the interior room of Structure 479, primarily located in Square E. Zone 7 was directly underlying Zone 6 and the zone remained restricted to fill inside the interior room. A color change in the soil signified the change from Zones 6 to 7. The matrix of Zone 7 was a lighter gray, silty clay soil with more densely packed limestone boulders and cobbles. Most of the limestone blocks in the fill were positioned upright in the matrix. The use of large, upright stones in the interior of the structure appeared to have been an expedient method of in-filling the room and doorway. The largest upright limestone blocks were found in the vicinity of the western doorway, positioned in a rough line as if to block the entrance and function as rough retaining wall for the interior room fill (Figure 3.5). These large slabs were finely cut stones that may have been originally part of the doorjamb walls, which were partially dismantled.

![Figure 3.5. Western cross-section of Structure 479 showing the central doorway infilled during Phase 3 (drawn by J. King and inked by E. Harrison-Buck).]

Several discrete fill layers were recognized during excavation of the interior room (see Figure 3.5). There was an initial layer of packed limestone cobbles (Zone 15), followed by a series of large, limestone slabs positioned upright in a loose to semi-compact matrix (Zone 7), topped with a darker gray matrix with small and large cobbles (Zone 6) that comprised some cut stones with plaster that appeared to have been robbed from another structure. The poor method of construction and use of robbed stone suggests that the site witnessed a decline during the final occupation, perhaps during the Postclassic period, at a time when
labor forces were lacking at the site. Like Zone 6, artifact density remained relatively low. Square E yielded a metate fragment and a large conch shell fragment that were point-plotted and mapped in planview.

**Zone 15**

Zone 15 consisted of the last 15-20 cm of construction fill overlying the latest floor surface (Zone 16 – Interior Floor 1) inside Structure 479. The fill was comprised of mostly small to medium sized limestone cobbles (25-0.2 cm) densely packed in a semi-compact matrix. Like Zone 7, Zone 15 also contained a number of the larger, limestone slabs situated upright in the matrix along with a number of nicely cut, recycled limestone blocks, some with plaster facing. The zone was located directly below Zone 7 and the size of the zone did not change, restricted to the interior portion of the room. Excavations removed the remainder of the Phase 3 fill lodged within the interior of the building and defined a fairly well-preserved plaster-like interior floor, along with an arching interior wall that formed a portion of a circular room. The limestone blocks used for the doorjams were finely cut stone, but the other stones of the interior wall were less well-produced, constructed of softer, more roughly-hewn limestone masonry. Traces of mortar-like material suggested that originally they may have been covered with plaster. As noted, some of the doorjamb stones were purposefully dismantled when the interior room was in-filled during Phase 3 and it is possible that the interior walls also were partially defaced at this time.

**Phase 2a**

**Zone 21**

Zone 21 consisted of a portion of the latest Plaza Floor 1 found in Square D that was built during Phase 2a, when Structure 479 was initially constructed (Figure 3.6). The floor was found to run underneath the Zone 19 step that was later added to the exterior of Structure 479 during Phase 2b. The Zone 21 floor surface appeared to be equivalent to Plaza Floor 1 (Zone 9) found in Square B. Plaza Floor 1 continued to be used during Phases 2b and 3. Plaza Floor 1 was directly overlying Plaza Floor 2 and covered over Substructure 479.

![South wall cross-section of Square D](image)

**Figure 3.6. South wall cross-section of Square D, showing Zones 21-24 and 26 in relation to the superstructure of Structure 479 (drawn and inked by E. Harrison-Buck).**
Zone 9

Zone 9 represented both Plaza Floors 1 and 2, two consecutive plaza floors built one on top of the other that were partially exposed in Square B. The division between these two floors was not recognized during excavation, but was clarified in the east wall cross-section of Square B where a small area of the floors were excavated together (Figures 3.7 and 3.8). Other parts of the excavation, namely Zone 21 in Square D, clearly showed these floors as two discrete surfaces (refer to Figure 3.6). Only a light density of artifacts were recovered in association with Plaza Floor 1, with the exception of a concentration of artifacts found in a midden deposit overlying Floor 1 in Square B (see Zone 4 below).

Figure 3.7. Cross-section of Structure 479 and Substructure 479 running underneath, looking south. Note Plaza Floors 1-3 (drawn and inked by E. Harrison-Buck).

Figure 3.8. Schematic cross-section of the east wall of Square B, showing the relative location of Zones 4, 8, and 12 in relation to Structures 479 and 482 (drawn and inked by E. Harrison-Buck).
Zone 20

When Plaza Floor 1 was laid down during Phase 2a, Zone 20, the superstructure of Structure 479, also was constructed (see Figures 3.6 and 3.8). At its highest point, the exterior of this free-standing circular wall contained four courses of finely cut, veneer-type facing stones. The interior wall was less well constructed and comprised more roughly hewn facing stones. The two sets of walls sandwiched a 20 cm thick core construction fill. The core fill was made up of limestone and chert cobbles and pebbles that ranged from 0.5 cm to 15 cm in diameter. All together, the free-standing wall measured approximately 85 cm thick. It was not until Phase 2b that the exterior step (Zone 19) was built that surrounded the perimeter of Zone 20 superstructure.

Zone 17

Zone 17 (Figure 3.9) consisted of the initial interior floor surface inside the room of Structure 479 that corresponded with the first building phase of Structure 479 (Phase 2a). Although it appeared to be a separate construction, the initial interior floor of Structure 479 appeared to be contemporaneous with the building of the exterior Plaza Floor 1. The building (Zone 20) comprised a circular superstructure with low, 4-course high walls and an interior floor surface (Zone 17) that was laid down inside the room of Structure 479.

Figure 3.9. East wall cross-section in Square E, showing Zones 16, 17 and 18 in relation to the northern interior wall of Structure 479 (drawn and inked by E. Harrison-Buck).
Terminal debris, consisting of ceramic sherds, animal bone, two marine shells, and a worked jaguar canine, were found resting on the surface of this floor, covered over and protected by a later resurfacing of the interior floor (Zone 16). The builders of the following floor construction may not have been concerned with cleaning the surface of the floor before building another floor directly over it. However, it is possible that these artifacts were purposefully left as a termination ritual at the end of the floor’s use.

Zone 4

During Phase 2, a large trash deposit was formed just to the north of Structure 479. Zone 4 consisted of a midden deposit restricted to Square B that was associated with Plaza Floor 1, Structure 482, and Structure 479 (Figure 3.10). The midden was originally part of a pit deposit (Zone 8) that was entirely in-filled with trash and overflowed onto the surrounding plaza floor. The dense layer of material removed in Zone 4 was an overflow of trash from the pit that was heaped on and around Plaza Floor 1, tapering out along the eastern and western edges of Square B, just north of the step of Structure 479. The pit cut into the southwestern corner of Structure 482 and trash was heaped on and around the corner of the structure.

Figure 3.10. Planview of Zone 4, the surface of a midden deposit found in Square B in the northeast corner of Operation 32 (drawn and inked by E. Harrison-Buck).
The midden debris in Zone 4 was comprised primarily of ceramic material. A high density of sherds lay relatively flat and layered over the pit and surrounding plaza floor area (refer to Figure 3.10). Lithics, shell, animal bone and other material also were recovered throughout Zone 4. Excavations of the zone entailed the removal of the layered trash debris. In the process of attempting to clear off the heaped midden material in Zone 4, intact portions of Plaza Floor 1 along the northern edge of Structure 479 in the southeast corner of the zone were partially removed with Zone 4. Further excavation of the plaza floor in this area of Square B (Zone 9) later revealed that there was two floors (Plaza Floors 1 and 2) built consecutively one on top of the other (Figure 3.7). The Zone 4 excavation had removed a small portion of Floor 1 along the northern edge of Structure 479, stopping at the surface of Floor 2. Excavations confirmed that the midden pit and heaped trash material was associated with the latest plaza floor (Phase 2). The debris stopped just north of the plinth (Zone 19) and the overflow of artifacts did not appear to run underneath the step, suggesting that the pit feature may have been dug during Phase 2b. However, the quantity of debris suggested it may have been dug during Phase 2a and perhaps was used for the duration of the site’s history. Zone 4 removed the heap of debris and some of the surrounding plaza floor and exposed a discrete pit feature filled with more refuse (Zone 8).

Zone 8

At the base of Zone 4, after excavating down roughly 10cm, the enigmatic pit feature was better defined (Figure 3.11). The material inside the pit was a continuation of the midden deposit in Zone 4, but was removed separately as Zone 8 to maintain vertical control of the deposit. Removing the deposit in arbitrary levels provides discrete stratigraphic levels with a relative chronology identifiable in the ceramic types from each zone. The methodology enables one to identify what the time depth was in the formation of the trash deposit (e.g., 50 years, 100 years, etc.).

The pit cut into the latest plaza floor and also cut into the side of Structure 482, an earthen mound to the north that was initially constructed during Phase 1 (see Phase 1a - Zones 10, 11 and 13). The western edge of the pit revealed a straight line of small, uncut stones that may relate to the edge of Structure 482, but limited horizontal exposure made this difficult to determine with any certainty. This rough line of stones abutted a portion of the outside of Substructure 479, the earlier round structure that also was associated with Phase 1. The straight line and orientation of the stones appeared to be in alignment with Structure 482 and not associated with Substructure 479. The pit appeared to cut into the edge of the southwestern corner of Structure 482 and may have been associated with later activities taking place on this mound during Phase 2 (perhaps functioning as a kitchen area?).

The midden pit cut into the surface of Plaza Floor 1 (Zone 9) and intruded into Plaza Floor 2 and a portion of an underlying midden-rich fill layer (Zone 11) that was part of an earlier Phase 1 construction. The interface between Zones 8 and 11 was difficult to discern—both were dark, organic-rich matrices filled with artifacts. As the edge of the pit was defined in Zone 8, small portions of the Zone 11 fill were removed as part of the pit fill. Zone 8 stopped short of the base of the pit. The bottom of the pit was removed as Zone 12 and may have included some of the Zone 11 fill as well. Figure 3.8 presents a schematic cross-section of the east wall of Square B that shows the relative position of Zones 4, 8, and 12, along with the surrounding floors and construction fill layers in relation to Structures 482 and 479.

Artifact density in Zone 8 was heavy, with high densities of partially reconstructable sherds, faunal material (primarily fish remains), freshwater and land snail, as well as some marine specimens, including one whole conch shell. Some lithics also were retrieved. Nearly all of the soil removed as Zone 8 was
Figure 3.11. Planview of Zone 8, the midden pit with locations of obsidian, C-14 samples, some ceramic, and marine shell point-plotted (drawn and inked by E. Harrison-Buck).

subjected to water flotation. Only 40 out of 225 liters of dirt was screened through 1/8" screen—the remaining dirt was floated with heavy and light fraction still to be processed. Around 12 liters of the total soil collected was reserved for pollen and phytolith analyses.

Zone 12

Zone 12 represented a mixture of trash debris lying directly below Zone 8 at the base of the midden pit and some of the Zone 11 midden-rich fill layer (see Figure 3.8). As noted in Zone 8, the distinction between these two dark, organic-rich layers filled with charcoal and other cultural material was difficult to discern. Zone 12 maintained the boundaries of the pit that were defined at the surface of Zone 8 and tapered in only slightly. Zone 12 was cleared down to the level of Plaza Floor 3 (Zone 26), a compact gray
clayey surface that was identified in parts of Squares B, D, and E. Excavations in Square B did not continue any deeper than this floor level.

**Phase 2b**

**Zone 16**

During Phase 2b, the interior floor of Structure 479 was re-surfaced (Zone 16) and a new floor was laid down directly overtop of the initial Zone 17 interior floor (Figure 3.9). The resurfaced floor sloped down slightly as it ran through the western doorway and merged with Plaza Floor 1, which was re-used during the final facet of Phase 2. The Zone 16 floor covered the first course of the interior superstructure walls of Structure 479 and clearly post-dated the initial Phase 2a construction. The floor surface was very compact but was not a formally prepared plaster surface. The floor consisted of a compact clay mixed with flecks of limestone resembling sascab material. Zone 16 had a densely-packed limestone ballast fill below the smooth plaster-like surface. Both interior floors (Zones 16 and 17) were flat and fairly well-constructed. The fine preservation of the Zone 16 floor was likely due to the protective construction fill (Zones 6, 7 and 15) that later in-filled the room during Phase 3 and transformed the building into a solid platform construction.

Unlike the interior floor, very little plaster existed on the outside plaza surface, especially in the areas that covered an earlier construction of another circular platform (Substructure 479). Here, the plaza floor appeared as a rough, cobble-filled surface with a large number of limestone and chert cobbles protruding through the surface that represented the fill of Substructure 479. The latest interior floor (Zone 16) was built during Phase 2b as part of a modification corresponding with the building of the outer step (Zone 19) that surrounded the perimeter of Structure 479.

**Zone 19**

Zone 19 represented the retaining wall and associated fill of an exterior step that was added to the perimeter of the Zone 20 free-standing superstructure of Structure 479 during Phase 2b (see Figures 3.6 and 3.8). The step contained at least two courses of facing stones, although the top course was only preserved in Squares A and B. Only one course was found intact in Square D. The step was excavated in Square D and not removed in the other squares where it was best preserved. Excavations in Square D revealed a fill consisting of both limestone and chert cobbles measuring roughly 0.2 cm – 20 cm in length. The step rested directly on an earlier circular platform structure (Substructure 479) and the surrounding Plaza Floor 1 (Zone 9 in Square B and Zone 21 in Square D) and clearly post-dated the construction of this latest plaza floor (refer to Figure 3.7).

**Phase 1a**

**Zone 26**

Zone 26 represented the earliest plaza floor (Plaza Floor 3) that was exposed in Operation 32 (Figure 3.12). The packed earthen surface was constructed during Phase 1a and was associated with Structure 482, as well as the initial phase of Substructure 479. The floor appeared to run underneath
Substructure 479 and may pre-date the early round structure. Small portions of the Zone 26 floor were defined in Squares B, D, and E in association with the exterior of Substructure 479. The packed earthen floor contained organic-rich debris and artifacts, namely sherds that were tamped into the surface. The floor was significantly higher in Square B than in Squares D and E. This may have been due to a natural slope that appeared to angle downward to the south.

**Zone 13**

Zone 13 represented the southwestern corner of Structure 482, a compact, clay-filled mound situated to the north of Structure 479 that extended beyond the northern limits of the excavation unit. Structure 482 was constructed during Phase 1a, when the initial plaza floor (Plaza Floor 3 – Zone 26) was laid down. The structure appeared contemporaneous (or may have slightly pre-dated) Substructure 479.

The low earthen mound of Structure 482 contained little evidence of any stonework. A small line of stones revealed in the Zone 8 midden pit may represent the western edge of the structure, abutting the northeastern edge of Substructure 479, but no large cut stones were evident (see Figure 3.10). Any traces of retaining wall stones may have been removed when the midden pit was dug into the corner of the structure and the line of stones may have been added later to define and/or reinforce the southwestern corner edge of Structure 482.

Although partially submerged by the subsequent fill and floor construction episodes, Structure 482 appears to have been maintained through time based on evidence of a later fill layer that was added to the exterior of the structure (see Zone 10) during Phase 1b. The placement of the midden pit suggests that the platform structure may have remained functional throughout Phase 2. The refuse found associated with the midden pit, corresponding with Phase 2, was more reflective of food preparation and other kitchen-related activities that perhaps took place on top of Structure 482. While several metate fragments and some evidence of tool production were found in association with Plaza Floor 1 surrounding Structure 479, no other obvious evidence of domicile activities were identified in direct association with Structure 479. The terminal debris of marine shell and speleothems, as well as a worked jaguar canine found inside the round structure suggests that the circular building may have held a more special, ritual-related focus.
Zone 14 represented Substructure 479, an earlier circular platform structure identified in Squares B, D, and E associated with the initial Plaza Floor 3 (Zone 26). The earlier round structure contained a solid retaining wall consisting of two courses of roughly cut limestone blocks. Slightly more than half of the circular platform was exposed in Operation 32 (Figure 3.13). Interestingly, only a small portion of the platform overlapped with the later circular structure (Structure 479). There appeared to have been a conscious effort to expand the plaza area during Phase 2. The newer circular structure was positioned further north of the original round structure and to the far east side of the plaza. This significant modification in site layout suggests a longevity in site occupation at Obsipo that was previously unknown. Additionally, the presence of two different circular structures indicate that this foreign type of architecture and any attached ritual activity was introduced early on in the site’s history. Its position in the main plaza suggests that this special-purpose structure played a central role in the local society for an extended period of time. Due to time constraints, the earlier circular substructure was not excavated. However, artifacts relating with two of the structure’s associated plaza floors (Plaza Floors 1 and 2) may provide a rough date for the initial occupation.

![Figure 3.13. Planview of Substructure 479, with Structure 479 superimposed overtop. Note the location of Zone 17 postholes in the southwest corner of unit (drawn and inked by E. Harrison-Buck).](image-url)
Zone 25

Zone 25 comprised a north-south wall running along the western edge of Square D in Operation 32 (see Figures 3.12 and 3.13). Like Substructure 479, the wall construction was resting on Plaza Floor 3. The wall abutted the earlier circular structure (Substructure 479) and was clearly associated with Substructure 479. The surface of the two-course high wall appeared flush with the top of Substructure 479, indicating it was not a step but perhaps functioned as a platform added to the southwestern side of Substructure 479. The roughly cut facing stones were identical to those used in the construction of Substructure 479, suggesting it was either a contemporaneous construction or slightly post-dated Substructure 479. The platform extended further to the south and west of the excavation unit so the exact dimensions could not be ascertained.

Phase 1b

Zone 9

As noted, Zone 9 in Square B removed a small portion of Plaza Floor 2 (along with some of Plaza Floor 1). Plaza Floor 2 appeared to run underneath the step and superstructure of Structure 479 (Figures 3.7 and 3.8). Plaza Floor 2 may have been removed as part of Zone 18 in Square E, defined as the midden-rich fill layer found in Square B (Zone 11) and Square D (Zone 23). Figure 3.9 shows the relative location of Plaza Floor 2 between Zones 17 and 18. This floor surface was laid down over the initial Plaza Floor 1 and covered a portion of Structure 482. The floor also covered about half of the two-course high retaining wall of Substructure 479 exposed in Square B. A similar situation was recorded for Plaza Floor 2 in Squares D (Zone 18) and E (Zone 22).

Zone 11

Zone 11 was a 15 cm thick midden-rich fill layer found directly below Plaza Floor 2 (Zone 9) in Square B to the north of Structure 479 and to the south of Structure 482. The 15 cm thick fill layer was aimed at building up a plaza surface outside of Substructure 479, covering at least the first course of stones on the two-course high retaining wall of Substructure 479. Zone 23 in Square D and Zone 18 in Square E were likely part of the same construction fill event, characterized as a midden-rich fill measuring 15-20 cm in depth. Zone 11 was found below Zone 10, a small amount of reddish-orange fill added to the southern side of Structure 482, indicating that the Zone 10 modification to Structure 482 post-dated or coincided with the Floor 2 (Phase 1b) construction. Zone 11 contained a high density of charcoal, ceramics and animal bone. The Zone 11 fill rested on a clay-packed, grayish floor surface (Floor 3 – Zone 26) associated with Substructure 479 and Structure 482. Zone 12 was laid down directly overtop of this earlier floor surface (Floor 3). Excavations did not extend below this floor.

Zone 18

Zone 18 (Figure 3.9) consisted of a midden-rich construction fill and what appeared to be the remains of Plaza Floor 2, located directly below Zone 17 (Interior Floor 2). Zone 18 was restricted to Square E. The midden-rich fill appeared to be the same fill layer as Zone 11 in Square B and Zone 23 in Square D. In each case, the fill layer was roughly 15-20 cm thick and was overlying the earliest floor surface (Plaza Floor 1) associated with Substructure 479. However, the elevation of the fill layer and subsequent floors in both Squares E and D (see Zones 22, 23, and 26) were significantly lower than those
found in Square B (roughly 20 cm deeper). It remained unclear how these floors corresponded. It is possible that the ground surface naturally sloped downward to the south for which subsequent construction had to compensate.

Zone 10

Zone 10 was a fill layer that was added to the exterior of Structure 482 following the construction of a midden-rich fill layer that was laid down during Phase 1b prior to the construction of Plaza Floor 2 (Figure 3.8). The matrix of Zone 10 was very red in color with a clayey consistency. The reddish-orange matrix contained a high density of baked clay material, fire-cracked rock, and charcoal, suggestive of intense burning. The matrix contained very few artifacts and sloped down off the southern edge of Structure 482. Initially, it was thought that Zone 10 was part of the midden deposit, perhaps a re-deposited hearth dumping, due to the midden-rich material found in Zone 11 directly below Zone 10. However, the 15-20 cm thick midden-rich layer (Zone 11) continued east and south beyond Square B and the limits of excavation. It was later understood to be part of the Zone 11 fill encountered at the base of the midden pit that was down in preparation for Plaza Floor 2. The Zone 10 fill layer that was added to the exterior of Structure 482 indicated that this structure continued to be used during Phase 1b. The presence of an intrusive midden pit in the structure’s southwest corner may point to the continued use of the platform as a kitchen area during Phase 2.

Zone 22

Zone 22 represented Plaza Floor 2 in Square D, a surface comprised of small limestone gravel (10 cm - 0.2 cm) inclusions, tightly packed in a semi-compact silty-clay matrix (see Figure 3.6). Zone 22 (Floor 2) was underlying Plaza Floor 1 (Zone 21 in Square D). Floor 2 was associated with a one-course high east-west wall (Zone 25) running along the southern edge of Square D that was built directly on Floor 2. In addition, Floor 2 in Square D was associated with Substructure 479, a two-course high wall that was partially covered over by the Zone 22 floor and underlying fill (Zone 23). A pit feature was found in the western half of Floor 2 in Square D. The pit was difficult to discern and was not excavated as a separate zone. It appeared to be associated with Plaza Floor 1, but intruded into Floor 2. The bulk of artifacts recovered from Zone 22 were in the vicinity of the intrusive pit feature and likely correspond to Phase 2. Notable artifacts included three complete conch shells and several small shell fragments. In addition, an obsidian core fragment and two blade fragments were found in the screen that also may be part of the pit feature.

Zone 23

Zone 23 consisted of a midden-rich fill layer in Square D that appeared to be the same 15-20 cm thick fill layer (Zone 22) found underlying Plaza Floor 2 throughout the excavation unit (Zone 11 in Square B and Zone 18 in Square E). The fill contained a medium density of charcoal and ceramics relative to the size of the zone. However, there was significantly less debris compared to Zone 11 in Square B. Like Zones 11 and 18, Zone 23 rested on a clay-packed grayish floor surface (Floor 3 – Zone 26) associated with Substructure 479 (Figure 3.6). At the base of Zone 23, a two-course high north-south wall (Zone 25) was exposed at the western edge of the zone (and Square) that abutted Substructure 479 (Figure 3.12). This wall was resting on Floor 3 and corresponded to Phase 1a (see Zone 25).
Zone 24

Zone 24 represented a one-course high wall running east-west in the southwest corner of Square D associated with Phase 1b (Figure 3.6). The wall rested on Plaza Floor 2 and ran underneath the plinth and superstructure of Structure 479, clearly pre-dating Phase 2. A line of three stones of the east-west wall was exposed along the southern edge of Square D. The wall cornered at the edge of the excavation unit and ran to the south, outside of Operation 32. The wall appeared to represent another structure located to the south of Substructure 479 that related with the final phase of the earlier round structure, corresponding with Phase 1b. Limited horizontal exposure hindered a more complete reconstruction of the Zone 24 wall.

Zone 27

Zone 27 comprised three unexcavated postholes identified on the surface of Plaza Floor 3 (Zone 26) in Square D (Figure 3.13). The three postholes were darker in color than the surrounding packed earthen floor and measured between 15 and 25 cm in diameter. The largest posthole contained a flat limestone cobble on its surface. The three features, intruding into Floor 3, may represent the remains of a perishable structure that was associated with the circular substructure. The posthole features were drawn in planview but not excavated during the 2003 season.

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Chapter 4
Residence and Resting Place of the Obispo Elite: Excavation of Operation 33

Emily R. Hall

Located on the lower reaches of the Sibun River, a day’s canoe ride from the shores of the Caribbean, Obispo was a small but established Maya village. A description of the site center at Obispo is provided in the previous chapter (see Harrison, Chapter 3). During the 2003 season, Operation 33 was positioned at the top of the largest structure at the site, Structure 475, located in the main plaza (see Figure 3.1). Previous investigation of this elite residence (Operation 31) exposed a plaster surface of the plaza area abutting the southeast corner of Structure 475, as well as an inset corner that represented the eastern side of a central, outset staircase flanking the southern side of the platform structure (see Morandi 2003).

Operation 33 returned to Structure 475 with the intention of better understanding the architecture of the mound, and with the hope of refining the site’s occupational chronology. While extensive bioturbation and differential preservation affected exploration of the structure, it was determined that structure 475 was constructed of alluvial clay with limestone retaining walls oriented at 255 degrees. The structure likely was comprised of four terraces leading up to a top platform that contained a perishable structure (Figure 4.1). There were no traces of a stone foundation for the perishable structure. However, evidence of a central limestone and earthen staircase was uncovered, which led up to the remains of a packed clay surface. Beneath these features lay the remains of an earlier surface and staircase, which were modified after the interment of an elite individual. Burial 3 was interred in the center of the structure, under the stairs at the southern edge of the platform. The habitation of structure 475 likely stretched from the Late Classic to the Terminal Classic, with sporadic use during the Postclassic. Its occupation and use appeared to correspond with the prosperity and decline detected in other excavated areas of the Obispo village (see Morandi 2003; Harrison, Chapter 3).

Excavation Techniques

Operation 33 was a 4 x 3 m unit that was oriented on a cardinal axis (see Figure 3.1). The unit was subdivided into four 2 x 1.5 m squares (Squares A, B, C, D). Evidence of intrusive pits and an interment led excavators to expand the southern half of the unit two meters to the west and one meter to the south (Squares E, F, and G).

Excavators primarily utilized trowels, occasionally relying on picks and shovels. When defining ceramics and skeletal remains, excavations proceeded with dental tools and bamboo sticks. Unless otherwise noted, one hundred percent of the soil was screened through ¼ inch mesh. Phytolith, pollen, and flotation samples were taken from each zone. Additional samples, including C-14, were collected from promising contexts.
Figure 4.1. Planview of Square C, Zones 3, 5, and 6; Square D, Zone 4 and 7, and other limestone alignments to the south (drawn by E. Hall and inked by E. Harrison-Buck).
Operation 33 Zones

Zone 1

Zone 1 was a layer of topsoil containing many roots and few inclusions. The zone contained evidence of modern burning (fire-cracked rock [FCR], charcoal, burned limestone, and charred cohune nuts) and bioturbation. The zone yielded a light density of sherds, debitage, and baked clay material (BCM). Four obsidian blade fragments were recovered, two medial and two proximal. The zone ended with the onset of a lighter, more compact layer designated Zone 2.

Zone 2

The bioturbation evident in Zone 1 continued to varying degrees in Zone 2, and there was deferential preservation throughout. While the density of artifacts in Zone 2 was light, it was greater than the density of either Zone 1 or Zone 3, which supports the theory of a surface between Zones 2 and 3. The Zone 2 artifact assemblage included sherds, debitage, BCM, the tip of a chert biface, fish bones, and turtle shell. More than a dozen obsidian blade fragments were recovered, largely from the central area of the unit. A projectile point was recovered from Square C; its miniature side-notched form is consistent with Postclassic lithics (Harrison-Buck, personal communication 2003, see Figure 4.2). This assemblage was possibly a mix of terminal debris corresponding to the Terminal Classic period and debris from post-occupational transitory use of the mound dating to the Postclassic.

![Figure 4.2. Postclassic side-notched projectile point (drawn by E. Hall and inked by S. Morandi).](image)

In areas of Squares A, B, C, and D a more compact, more yellowish matrix was encountered at the base of Zone 2, seemingly the remains of an ancient packed clay surface. In the northwestern corner of Square A, a concentration of BCM marked the interface of Zones 2 and 3, perhaps evidence of a burning event that baked the packed clay surface. Cutting across the southern half meter of Squares C and D, as well as the southeastern portion of Square E, was an alignment of limestone cobbles that represented
remains of the mound’s central staircase. This alignment was designated Zone 5, while the tumble to the south and west was designated Zone 6.

Zone 3

In Squares A, B, and the northern meter and a half of Squares C and D, the postulated packed clay surface at the interface of Zones 2 and 3 covered a compact earthen construction-fill. Parts of Zone 3 were extensively bioturbated. The Zone 3 soil was predominantly mottled with a burned matrix—with reddish soils and higher densities of FBCM, FCR, and sherds. The artifact density was light, though higher in the burned areas and in the upper portion of Zone 3. The assemblage included debitage, sherds, BCM, turtle shell, and a chert nodule, as well as more obsidian blade fragments.

Zones 4, 8, 9, 10, and 11

Zone 3 was ended arbitrarily, and was followed by Zones 4, 9, 10, and 11, all representative of construction fill. Zone 8 was a roughly circular area of darker, looser matrix measuring less than a meter in diameter, surrounded by the Zone 9 construction fill in Square C. Zone 8 was first thought to be a pit feature, but upon further investigation, it appeared to be the remains of a tree-fall depression. The differentiation between Zones 3, 4, 9, 10, and 11 was largely arbitrary for purposes of depth control. These zones were also compact clay construction fill mottled with burned soil. Due to the absence of architectural features, and the progressively lighter concentrations of artifacts, all zones were not excavated in all squares. Artifacts recovered from Zones 3, 4, 9, 10, and 11 included debitage, sherds, BCM, turtle shell, animal bone, and obsidian. At the base of Zone 11 a number of large sherds, lying flat, were encountered in the south central extremity of Square C, perhaps indicative of a floor surface. However, this underlying area, designated Zone 12, was ultimately characterized as fill.

Zone 12

Zone 12 was excavated only in the southern meter of Squares C and D. The zone appeared as a continuation of the mottled, compact, clay-rich construction fill that contained few artifacts, with the exception of several large, thick-walled friable sherds with a tan paste, probably from a large olla, in the southern end of the zone. The zone was ended when it was decided that these artifacts were associated with the zones underlying the area of the staircase, which was eventually discovered to be a mortuary deposit.

Zone 5

In the southern zones of Squares C, D, F and G, as well as the eastern half of Square E, lay tumble debris and a series of stone alignments. The stone alignments appeared to be the remains of a central, outset staircase. A two-course high wall constructed of roughly cut limestone cobbles (Zone 5), running in an east-west line (referred to as Alignment1), was retaining a thick fill layer and represented the top, northernmost step of the staircase. This step appeared to be part of a later modification to the stairs that was built following the interment of the burial, which lay almost directly beneath the Zone 5 step. Tumble (Zone 6) covering the stairs abutted the step to the south.
Zone 6

Zone 6 was the tumble to the south of Zone 5, which consisted of small limestone pebbles and larger inclusions in a clay-filled matrix. In Square E, partial removal of the tumble revealed a three-course high, north-south line of stones (Wall Alignment 1 - Zone 23), which was articulated and mapped, but not excavated. In Square F, another north-south wall (Wall Alignment 2) was identified and mapped. These stone alignments appeared to be the west and east edges, respectively, of the central staircase in its final phase of construction (Figure 4.3). This probable staircase was oriented 20 degrees east of north.

Figure 4.3. Planview, showing parallel northsouth walls of outset staircase and relative position of burial deposit (drawn by E. Hall and inked by E. Harrison-Buck).
Zones 7 and 13

Zone 7 was an earthen layer, seemingly tumble that underlay the Zone 6 tumble, which roughly comprised the southern 150 cm of the unit, sloping off the structure to the south. The artifact density of this zone was light, consisting of animal bone, debitage, sherds, obsidian, and BCM. In Square F, to the east of the north-south wall (Wall Alignment 1 - Zone 23), Zone 7 ended when the remains of a plaster surface (Zone 14) were encountered. In the southeast of Square F, where the plaster was not preserved, the underlying cobble layer was designated Zone 18. To the east of the north-south wall (Wall alignment 3 in Squares D and G), Zone 7 ended with the onset of the remains of a different plaster surface, Zone 22, and the underlying cobble layer (Zone 18). Zone 7 ended in Square C when a slightly less compact, more olive-hued matrix with fewer inclusions was encountered. This underlying matrix, labeled Zone 13, was located in Squares C, E and F along the southern end of the unit and might represent a poorly preserved floor surface for the top step of the staircase. This surface overlay the Zone 14 step floor and may correspond or post-date the burial interment. A portion of Zone 13 in Square C represented a pit feature cutting into the surrounding floor surface, also designated Zone 13. It was a similar matrix to the rest of Zone 13. The artifact density in the intrusive pit feature of Zone 13 was higher than that of the surrounding matrix, and included debitage, sherds, BCM, and animal bone, including fish vertebrae.

Zone 14

Zone 14 was an earthen layer with limestone flecks, FCR and limestone pebbles in the area underlying and to the east of the Zone 23 wall. The zone was differentially preserved, but seemed to represent an eroded floor for the top step or steps of the staircase. On the border of Squares C and F, in the center of this area, the absence of pebbles and the mottled presence of an olive colored matrix indicated the continuation of the Zones 13 and 15 pit features. The two pit features, Zones 13 and 15, were originally thought to represent a single burial cut, but later it was realized that the two intrusive features were separate occurrences, though perhaps related to the same ritual event corresponding with the burial of the elite individual. Zone 14 ended with the designation of Zone 15, a clay-filled matrix with few inclusions, which consisted of both burial and construction fill only roughly defined by an enigmatic pit feature.

Zone 15

Zone 15 was a layer of mottled, compact clay relating to the burial interment. Zone 15 was initially thought to be an in-filled burial pit. However, the burial cut was virtually indiscernible. This was either because the individual was interred into fill as the staircase was being built, or, more likely, because the pit was dug into the packed clay surface of the top step and the mottled clay construction fill was then used as back-fill, leaving no visible signature. Overall, the parameters of the burial were difficult to discern. The only clear cut into the Zone 14 surface was the Zone 13 pit feature that was separate from the burial deposit, but may have been related to the ritual event. The area encompassed by the interment proved to be larger than initially thought and the excavation unit was expanded to the west and south (into Squares D, E, F and G). In the central area of the border between Squares C and F, there was evidence that the burial deposit cut into the Zone 14 floor. At the western end of Zone 15, to the east of the Zone 23 wall, there was a very high density of BCM and other evidence of burning which continued downward into other zones, perhaps indicating another pit feature.
The artifacts recovered in Zone 15 thus seem primarily to be associated with the burial, though some may relate to one or more pit features. The assemblage included animal bone (including fish vertebrae and worked turtle shell), debitage, obsidian, BCM, sherds, a conch, and two ceramic vessels. (Figure 4.4). A smashed, thin walled, dark vessel (Vessel 1, which consisted of about half of the original vessel), and an inverted, smashed red bowl (Vessel 2, which was more complete, though possibly missing the southwestern portion) were defined in situ. Dr. Sandra López Varela identified Vessel 1 as a Macal Orange jar, and Vessel 2 as a Roaring Creek Red serving bowl (personal communication, 2003). Beneath the sherds of Vessel 2 lay a conch shell and an obsidian blade fragment. About 40 cm below these objects were the knees of Burial 3. In the center of Zone 15 was a mottled burned area. Debitage, a number of large, thick-walled sherds, and worked turtle shell were also encountered. These thick-walled sherds, present in Zones 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, and 21, were identified by Dr. López Varela as Tinaja Red sherds, probably all coming from the same large jar. These huge storage jars were identified with the very end of the Late Classic period (López Varela personal communication, 2003). The presence of sherds from this same vessel scattered throughout the matrix above and associated with the burial, but not in the matrix outside of this area, lent evidence to the view that Burial 3 was not interred at the time of the step’s construction, but rather was a pit burial with no visible signature. After 20 cm, the artifact density lightened, and Zone 16 was designated for purposes of vertical control.

Zone 16

Zone 16 was a continuation of the mottled, clay-rich burial/construction fill of Zone 15. The western end of the zone continued to exhibit evidence of intrusive features, in the form of intensive burning evidence, elevated concentrations of BCM, and fewer artifacts than were found in the rest of the zone. To a lesser degree, there was evidence of burning throughout the zone, in the form of charcoal, BCM, an area of ash, and a burned chipped stone tool. This evidence, combined with the overall medium-high density of artifacts (including animal bone, debitage, obsidian, sherds, shell, and a burnishing stone), suggested that the Zone 16 fill consisted at least partially of a re-deposited midden. Also, while some of the Zone 16 sherds seemed to be pieces of the same vessels, they were scattered throughout the zone. Zone 16 was terminated when bone was encountered in Square C. Zone 17 included the bones and the surrounding matrix (see further below).

Zones 19 and 21

Later, when it was discovered that the burial extended to the north and east of what had originally been thought of as the burial cut, excavations continued eastward into Squares D and G. Additionally in Square C, Zones 19 and 21 were removed to the north, and Zone 17 was expanded to expose the rest of the individual and the associated matrix. Zone 19 was comprised of the southern 70 cm of Squares C and D, and the northern 40 cm of Square G. These limits were laid out arbitrarily, but with the intention of exposing all of the mortuary deposit. There was no apparent color or texture difference throughout Zone 19, and the zone most probably represented a mix of burial pit fill and surrounding (non-discernable) construction fill. Zone 19 ended after 20 cm in depth and was followed by Zone 21, a similar deposit of construction and burial pit fill. Zone 21 ended at the approximate level at which the bone was encountered in Square C, and the matrix beneath was designated Zone 17.

Like Zones 15 and 16, Zones 19 and 21 showed evidence of burning. The artifact density in both Zones 19 and 21 was medium and consisted of animal bone, debitage, sherds, obsidian, pumice, coral, and a marine shell. Several large, friable sherds were recovered from Zone 19, probably part of the above-
Figure 4.4. Planview of Zone 15 pit feature (drawn by E. Hall and inked by E. Harrison-Buck).
mentioned Tinaja Red jar. Vessel 3 was discovered in Zone 21 of Square G, and is discussed in further detail below.

Zone 17

Zone 17 was composed of approximately the southern 40 cm of Squares C and D, as well as the northern 40 cm of Squares F and G. The zone contained the remains of an extended individual (Burial 3) and the associated matrix (Figure 4.5). Like the Zones 16 and 21 matrix above it, the soil of Zone 17 was a mottled, compact clay with charcoal, BCM, and few inclusions. The matrix of Zone 17 was slightly darker than the soils above it. Aside from the skeletal remains, the artifact density was light. The assemblage consisted of animal bone, sherds, debitage, obsidian, BCM, and coral.

Figure 4.5. Planview of Burial 3 (drawn by E. Hall and inked by E. Harrison-Buck).
Burial 3 comprised an articulated, extended, prone individual oriented 110 degrees east of north, with the head to the east. Steve Morandi identified the individual as an adult male (personal communication, 2003). The skeletal remains were somewhat fragmentary, but all excluding the hands and feet were articulated in situ (Figure 4.5). The preservation of the remains was superior on the individual’s right (southern) half. An obsidian blade fragment was encountered to the north of the left humerus. The left hand and wrist bones of the individual were located underneath the left side of the pelvis. Vessel 3, located in Zone 21 of Square G, lay directly over the right hand and wrist of the individual. This broken, very friable, thin-walled vessel was in an upright position. The small vessel had a pinkish paste and a black slip. Dr. López Varela identified the rounded bowl as an Achote Black vessel that could be characterized as a ceremonial or prestige object (personal communication, 2003). Beneath the south side of the cranium, an additional bone was encountered. Bone 30 was not part of the cranium, and may not be human. The bone was burned and possibly worked. It appeared to be part of a long bone, 9 cm by 13 cm, cut at one end and broken/tapering at the other. Excavation was halted several centimeters below the bones. All Zone 17 matrix was either subjected to water flotation or screened though 1/8" mesh.

Zone 20

Zone 20 was a North-south wall (Alignment 3) that post-dated the burial deposit (see Figure 4.3). This two-course high retaining wall ran 20 degrees east of north along the western edge of Squares D and G and was built over top of the burial. The wall ran the length of Square G, but was only present in the southern 40 cm of Square D. The limestone cobble wall was faced on the eastern side, and possibly retained Zones 7 and 13 that covered the burial on its western side. At the base of Zones 18 and 20, in the southwest corner of Square D and the northwest corner of Square G, limestone flecking was present, perhaps indicating the remains of an eroded floor. A light density of artifacts, perhaps representing the terminal debris of this surface, was recovered. They consisted of debitage, sherds, BCM, and a marine shell. This occupational phase perhaps corresponded with the use of the Zone 14 surface.

Zone 18

Zone 18 was a chert and limestone cobble layer in the southeastern area of the unit that likely functioned as ballast fill for the overlying Zone 22 floor surface. The cobbles covered nearly all of Square G, while they ended in an alignment about 30 cm to the north of the southern edge of Square D (see Figure 4.3). Deposited after the Zone 20 wall, Zone 18 abutted the faced stones on the east and covered the remains of the eroded floor. While all other diagnostic sherds from Operation 33 were identified as Late Classic, Dr. López Varela identified several Zone 18 sherds, including a ceramic spike from an incensario, to be Terminal Classic (personal communication, 2003).

Zone 22

Covering the Zone 18 cobble layer in the southwestern extremity of Square D, and the northwest quadrant of Square F, was Zone 22—a layer of pebbles, FCR, and limestone flecks. Presumably, after the use of the Zone 20 wall and the surface at the base of Zone 18 was terminated, the Zone 18 cobbles were added to level the ground, and were then capped by the Zone 22 surface. The Zone 22 artifacts (the terminal debris associated with this construction phase) were few, and consisted of worked and un-worked animal bone, debitage, and sherds.
Concluding Remarks

Three phases of construction are postulated. In the first phase of construction, the four-terraced earthen foundation was built, with limestone retaining walls and a central staircase. This staircase would have been bordered on the west by the Zone 23 north-south wall (Alignment 1). The stairs were evened out with pebbles and coated with plaster (Zone 14). At the top of the mound, at the interface of Zones 2 and 3, was a packed clay surface, presumably with a perishable structure. The artifact assemblage points to a domestic residence, while the size of structure 475 as well as the presence of marine shells, coral, decorative ceramics, and large numbers of obsidian blades indicate the elevated status and wealth of the inhabitants of the prominent platform structure.

When a male in the family, perhaps a community leader of Obsipo, died during the Late Classic period, he was interred, along with a number of ceramic pieces, marine and turtle shells, and obsidian blade fragments. It appears that one or more burning events were associated with the funerary rituals. It seems likely that the burial was a pit interment, as a number of similar artifacts (e.g. the Tinaja Red jar sherds) were recovered from the matrix above the burial that were not encountered in the general construction fill. However, no pit signature was recognized.

The burial pit, which was placed on the southern edge of the platform under the top of the staircase, appears to have intruded into the Zone 14 floor that covered the stairs and was possibly capped by the Zone 13 surface. The east-west wall (Zone 5) represented a top step that was built over top of the burial and was associated with the Zone 13 surface. Both Zones 13 and 14 floor surfaces were retained by the north-south walls of the outset staircase (Zones 20 and 23). Around this time, one or more pit features were dug into the Zone 13 floor, perhaps to dedicate the next phase of construction, and/or to honor the ancestor interred below.

During the Terminal Classic, the final construction phase occurred, involving the resurfacing of the surrounding terrace floors. A ballast fill comprised of cobbles and pebbles (Zone 18) with an associated plaster surface (Zone 22) were constructed. The packed-clay platform surface of the first construction phase continued to be utilized.

It seems that the mound fell into disuse during the late Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic phase. As evidenced by operation 30 excavations, the Obispo site was still being used in the Postclassic, perhaps as a ritual site (see Morandi 2003). This transient use would account for the lack of Postclassic artifacts from Operation 33, with the exception of the projectile point and perhaps a light scatter of ceramic debris.