

THE 2010 EXCAVATIONS AT STRUCTURE 26, LA MILPA

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Initial work from 2007–2009 in and around the Courtyard D/Kotaniil Courtyard complex determined that the area has a long and complicated construction history. On the western side of Courtyard D, excavations on Structure 27 documented multiple construction phases dating from the Late Preclassic period through the Terminal Classic period (Houk and Smith 2010). Furthermore, on the northern side of the Kotaniil Courtyard, excavations on

Structure 23 demonstrated that the Late Classic/Terminal Classic tandem range building was under renovation at the time of abandonment, with large boulder fill placed on the southern side of the building and the summit rooms apparently in-filled with compacted marl and limestone blocks (Padilla and Smith 2010).

Structure 26 (Figure 1) is a tandem range building that defines the southern limits

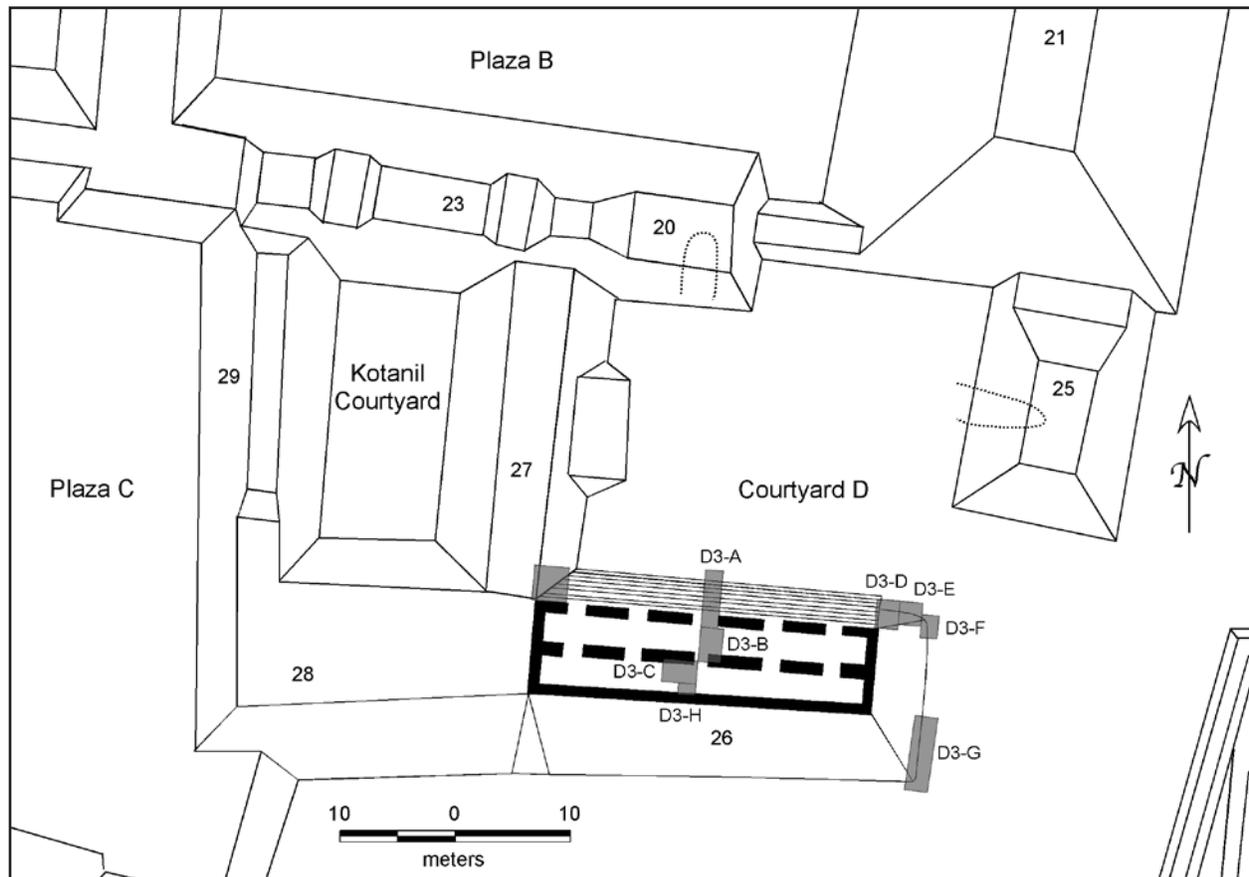


Figure 1. Map of Courtyard D showing location of Operation D3 2010 Excavations at Structure 26.

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of Courtyard D. The mound measures approximately 31 m in length, 15 m in width, and approximately 4 m in height as measured from Courtyard D (north side) and 9 m in height as measured from the building's southern base (Figure 2). The western end of the building joins the southern end of Structure 27 and the eastern end of Structure 28, which to date has not been investigated.

The La Milpa Core Project's (LMCP) Structure 26 investigations in May and June of 2010 were designed to reveal the nature of architectural configuration and assess the degree to which the building had been completed and/or modified during its latest construction history (see Figure 1). Excavation units (Tables 1 and 2) were placed along the mound's central stairway (Subops D3-A), its central summit (Subops D3-B, -C, and -H), and along the building's northeast (Subops D3-D, -E, and -F), southeast

(Subop D3-G), and northwest corners (Subop D3-I). The results of these excavations are presented below.

STAIR AND SUMMIT EXCAVATIONS: SUBOPS D3-A, -B, -C, AND -H

Four suboperations were centrally placed on the summit and north face of Structure 26 to define the latest architectural arrangement of the building, assess the relative preservation and integrity of the architecture, and determine the degree to which architectural renovation or modification was carried out. Evidence from excavations and surface inspection indicates that Structure 26 is a tandem range building atop a terraced platform. The structure has a 1.20-m thick spine wall extending the length of the building, dividing northern and southern rooms. Excavations encountered a 1.75-m wide central doorway through the spine wall,

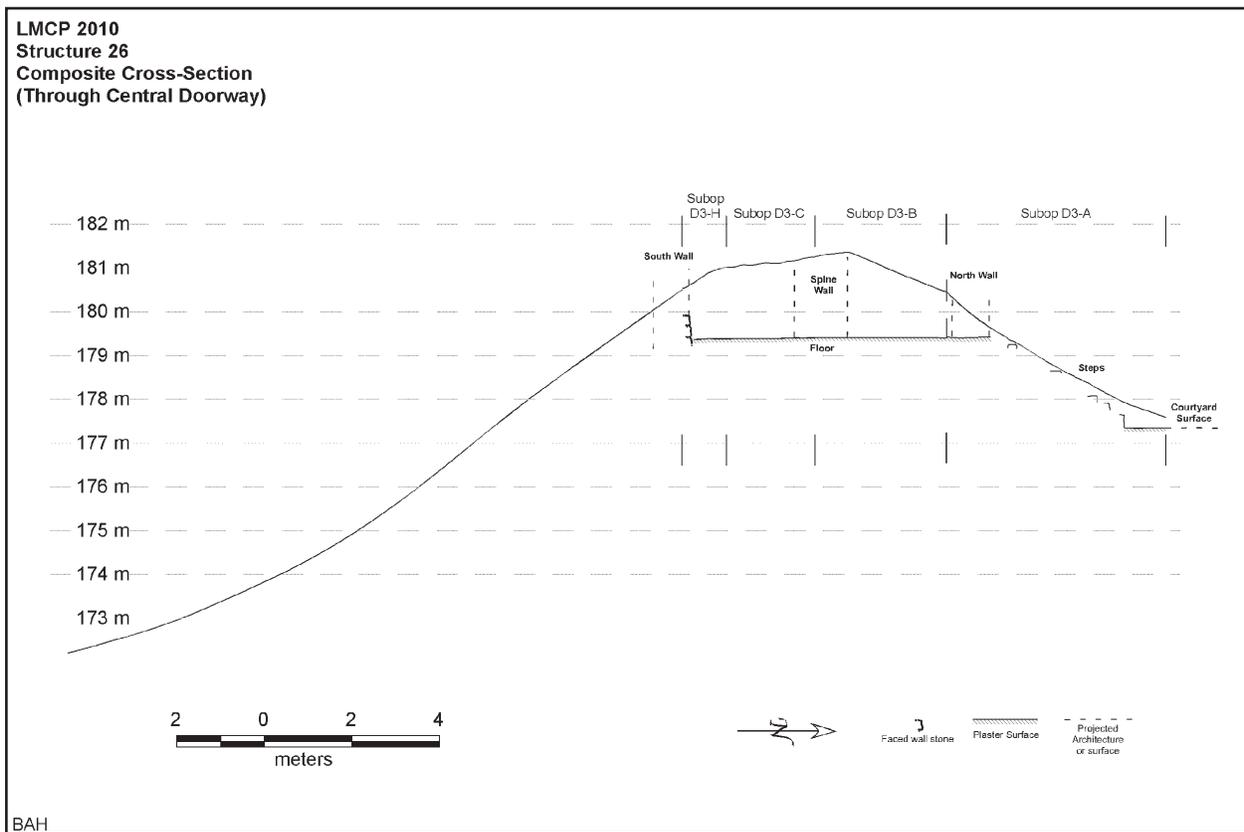


Figure 2. Western cross-section of Structure 26 along primary axis through central doorway.

Table 1. List of Operation D3 Suboperations on Structure 26 Excavated in 2010

Subop	Size (m)	Location
A	1.5 x 5	Central stair
B	2 x 3	Summit Str. 26, centrally located on north side
C	2 x 3	Summit Str. 26, centrally located on south side
D	2 x 2.5	Base of Str. 26, near NE corner
E	2 x 2	Base of Str. 26, near NE corner, adjacent to D3-D
F	1.5 x 2	Base of Str. 26, near NE corner, adjacent to D3-E
G	2 x 6.5	Base of Str. 26, east end near SE corner
H	1 x 1.5	Summit Str. 26, adjacent to Subop D3-C, SE corner
I	3 x 3	Slope of intersection between Str. 26/27

though it appears that the eastern doorjamb was, at some point, extended 50 cm across the opening, leaving an approximately 1.25-m wide passageway associated with the building's final architectural phase.

Central Stair: Subop D3-A

Subop D3-A was a 1.5-x-5-m unit oriented north-south and situated on the northern face of Structure 26, descending from near the summit area to the Courtyard D surface. It was positioned to reveal the nature and integrity of the central stair. Lots 1 and 2 were designated the humus layer and building collapse, respectively, while Lot 3 was assigned to the latest identifiable stairs. Excavation of Subop D3-A determined the final stairway to be poorly preserved, with perhaps four identifiable steps utilizing two courses of stone each (Figure 3). The steps were constructed of cut limestone blocks, where most range from 20–40 cm in length. Some remain somewhat in alignment, while most appear displaced. Several steps are likely missing, making any accurate measurement of spacing

Table 2. List of Lots by Suboperation in Operation D3.

Subop	Lot	Definition
A	1	Humus
	2	Building collapse
	3	Poorly preserved final stairs
	4	Plaster floor / landing
	5	Penultimate stairs
	6	Heavily eroded Courtyard D surface / subsurface fill
	7	Str. 26 north wall / eastern doorjamb of northern room
B	1	Humus
	2	Building collapse
	3	Eastern doorjamb on spine wall of central rooms
	4	Plaster floor
	5	50-cm extension of eastern doorjamb on spine wall of central room
C	1	Humus
	2	Building collapse debris
	3	Spine wall and western doorjamb of central rooms
	4	Plaster floor
D	1	Humus and building collapse debris
	2	Terrace face of Str. 26 platform
	3	Eroded plaster floor at base of terrace
	4	Possible collapsed/eroded stairway
E	1	Humus and building collapse debris
	2	Terrace face of Str. 26 platform
	3	Eroded plaster floor at base of terrace
F	1	Humus and building collapse debris
	2	Terrace face of Str. 26 platform
	3	Eroded plaster floor at base of terrace
G	1	Humus and building collapse debris
	2	Terrace face of Str. 26 platform
H	1	Humus
	2	Building collapse debris
	3	Interior face of south wall of Str. 26
	4	Plaster floor
I	1	Humus and building collapse debris

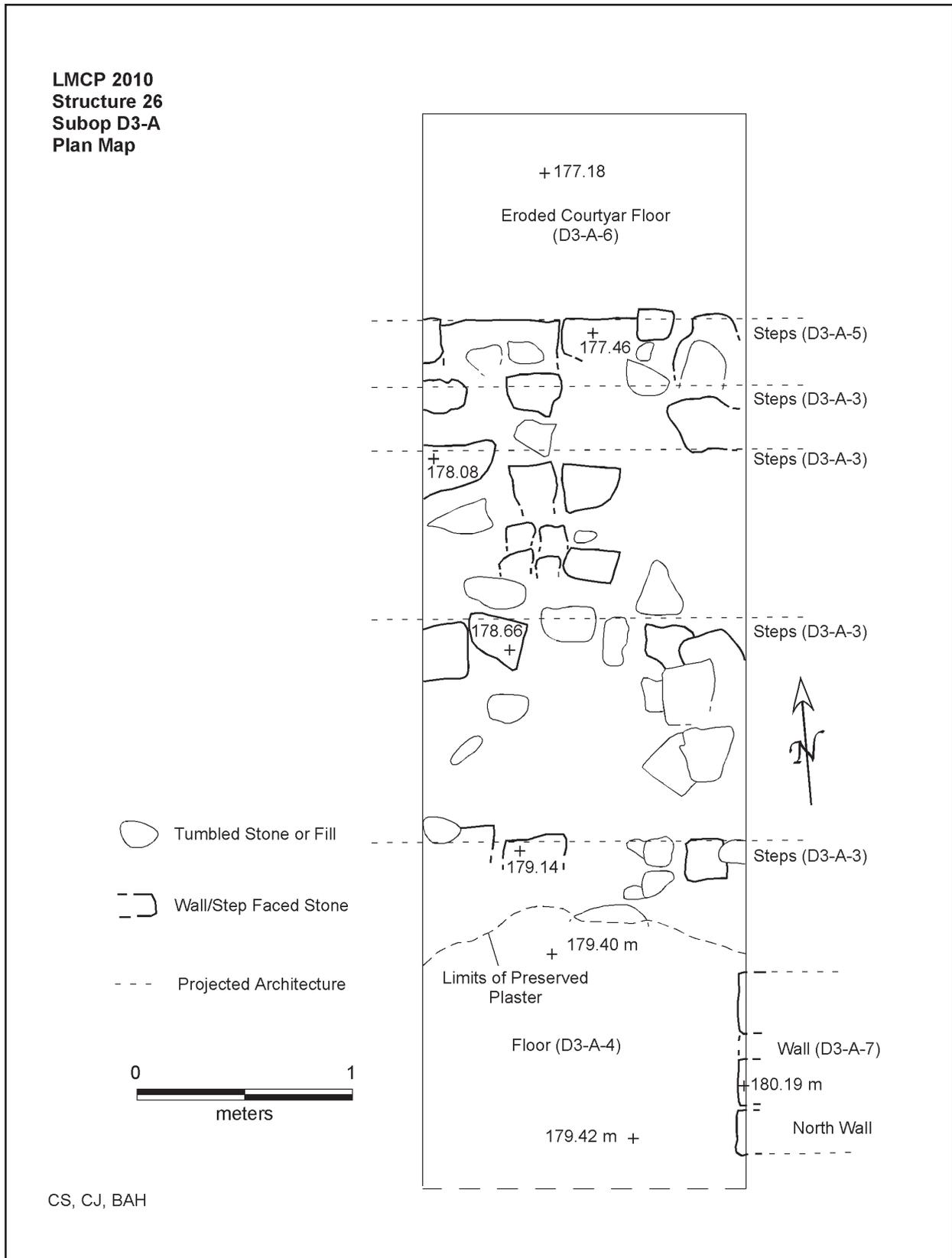


Figure 3. Plan map of Subop D3-A.

very difficult. Poor preservation of the latest construction phase of the stairway is a result of the shallow nature of architecture coupled with significant root disturbance. However, the lack of any well-defined bulge on the surface, coupled with information from Subops D3-D and -I (see below), also suggests this phase of the stairway likely extended nearly the entire length of the building.

Excavation of the southernmost 50 cm of the suboperation encountered a moderately preserved plaster surface or landing (Lot 4) associated with the final phase of the stairway. Given the eroded nature of the surface toward the north, coupled with the poor preservation of the upper stairs, definite articulation with the latest stair was not identified. However, as revealed in Subop D3-B, the plaster surface corresponds to the latest phase architecture of Structure 26 and thus with the latest stairs.

Excavation beneath the lowest steps (nearest to the Courtyard D surface) associated with late phase construction revealed two steps of an earlier stairway, designated Lot 5. The lowest step exhibits the greatest preservation and appears to have been well constructed. Limestone block construction is somewhat larger and more regular on average in this step than observed in the latest-phase stairway, where blocks range from about 40–60 cm in length and are much more quadrangular in shape.

Excavation of the northernmost 1 m of Subop D3-A revealed a heavily eroded Courtyard D surface (Lot 6). Intact remains of the surface were not found, though excavation did encounter small, dry-laid cobbles indicative of immediate sub-floor fill.

Finally, excavation in the southern reaches of Subop D3-A revealed the eastern doorjamb of the northern wall of Structure 26's north/central room (Lot 7). The wall/jamb was only visible

in the east profile of the Subop, extending only about 3–4 cm into the unit. The wall is 85 cm in width and preserved to a maximum height of 70 cm above the plaster floor (Lot 4). It is composed of cut limestone blocks ranging from 10 x 20 cm to 20 x 38 cm. The south side of the wall is better preserved than the north side, which has collapsed down the face of the mound above the second course of stones.

Summit Rooms: Subops D3-B, -C, and -H

Northern Room

Subop D3-B measured 2 x 3 m and was oriented north-south. The unit was centrally positioned on the north face of the summit of Structure 26, with the intention of exposing latest-phase architecture of the building. The northern edge of the unit met Subop D3-A, which descended to the Courtyard D surface. Prior to excavating Subop D3-B, surface morphology of Structure 26 suggested that a spine wall extends east-west along the center of the building, with a probable central doorway connecting southern and northern rooms. Subop D3-B exposed part of the northern face of the spine wall, the eastern doorjamb, an architectural extension of the doorjamb, and a portion of the doorway through the spine wall (Figures 4 and 5). The 20–30-cm thick humus layer was designated Lot 1, while building collapse debris was designated Lot 2. Collapse debris consisted of chunks of limestone (cut or otherwise) within a gray/white marly matrix. Large slab stones indicative of a corbel-vaulted roof were commonly removed in building collapse.

The spine wall and original eastern doorjamb was designated Lot 3, while the architectural expansion of the doorjamb was designated Lot 5. The spine wall was well preserved to a height of approximately 1.85 m above an associated plaster floor (Lot 4). Based on exposed architecture and surface elements, the wall measures approximately 1.20 m thick

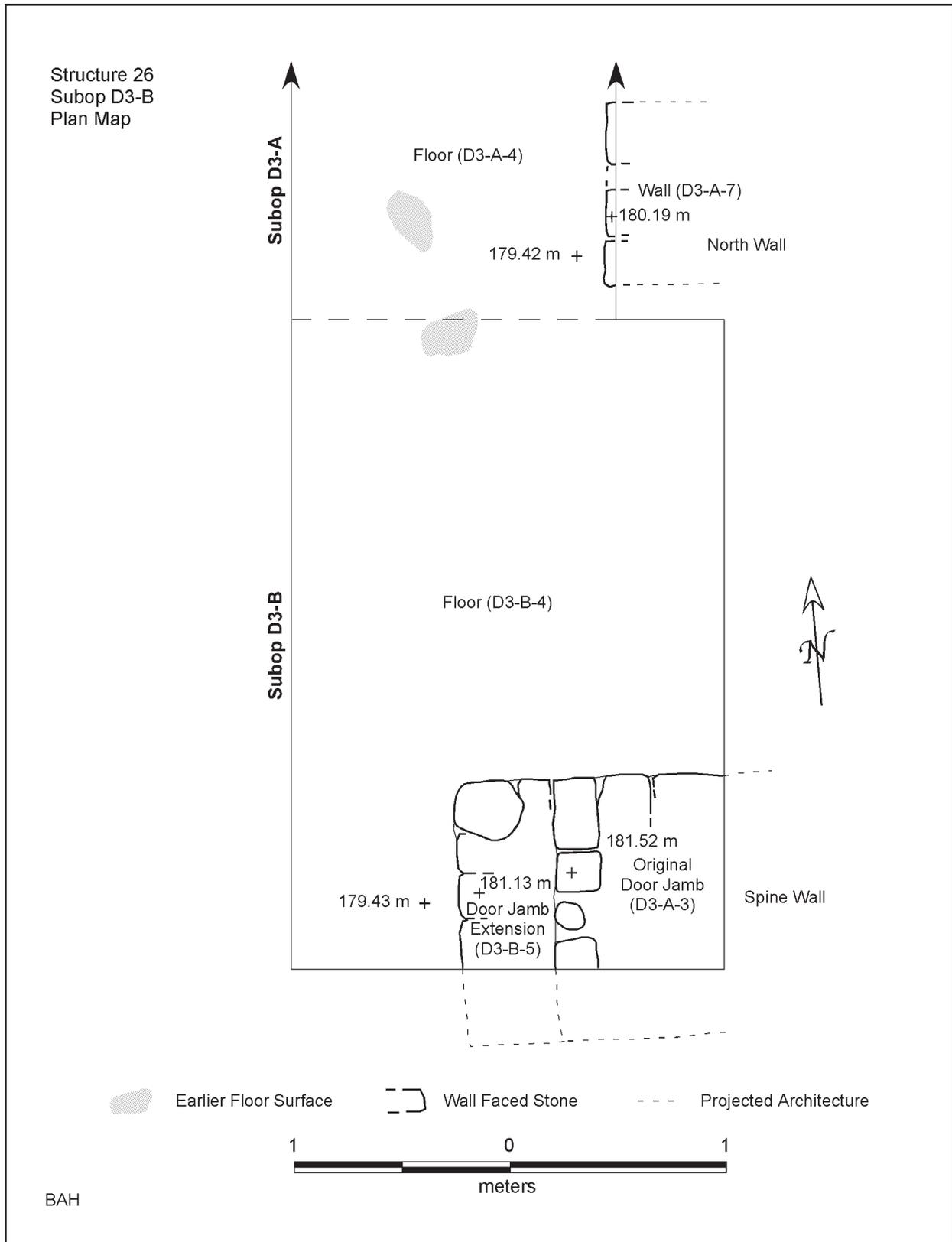


Figure 4. Plan map of exposed portion of northern room in Subop D3-B and southern portion of Subop D3-A.

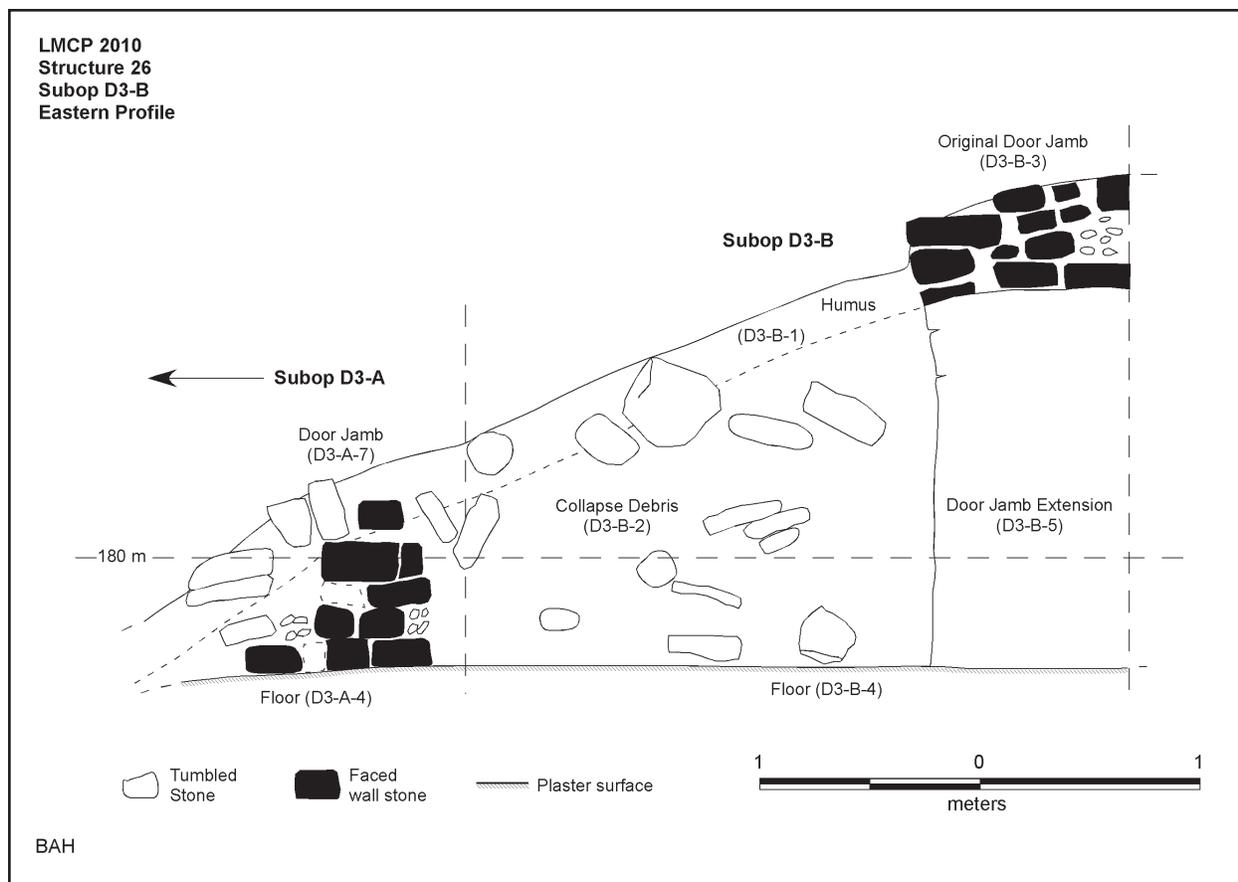


Figure 5. Eastern elevation drawing of Subop D3-B and southern portion of Subop D3-A.

and is constructed of cut and shaped limestone blocks. Cut stones vary in size, but range on the order of 20–40 cm in length and 15–20 cm in height. The core of the wall contains medium chunks of limestone construction fill set in a soft marly mortar. The original passageway through the spine wall measures approximately 1.75 m wide, based on exposed architecture on the surface and in both Subops D3-B and -C. Using cut/shaped limestone blocks, this passageway was narrowed to approximately 1.25 m wide, presumably during the Late/Terminal Classic period (Figure 6). Based on comparative information from Subop D3-C (see below), it appears this architectural renovation was only added to the eastern doorjamb. Finally, using information from both Subops D3-A and -B, the northern room measured approximately 2.28 m wide.

Excavation of Subop D3-B terminated at a well-preserved plaster floor (Lot 4) with evidence of replastering observed in several locations. Two samples of plaster were recovered from this lot for potential chemical analysis. The first was located 60 cm east of the doorjamb and 15 cm north of the wall, while the second was located 80 cm east of the doorjamb and 145 cm north of the wall. During sample extraction, it was determined that the earlier plaster surface measured approximately 11–13 cm in thickness, while the latest surface measured approximately 3–5 cm in thickness.

Southern Room

Subop D3-C and -H measured 2 x 3 m and 1 x 1.5 m, respectively, and they were positioned on the southern face of the summit area of Structure 26 to provide complementary architectural data

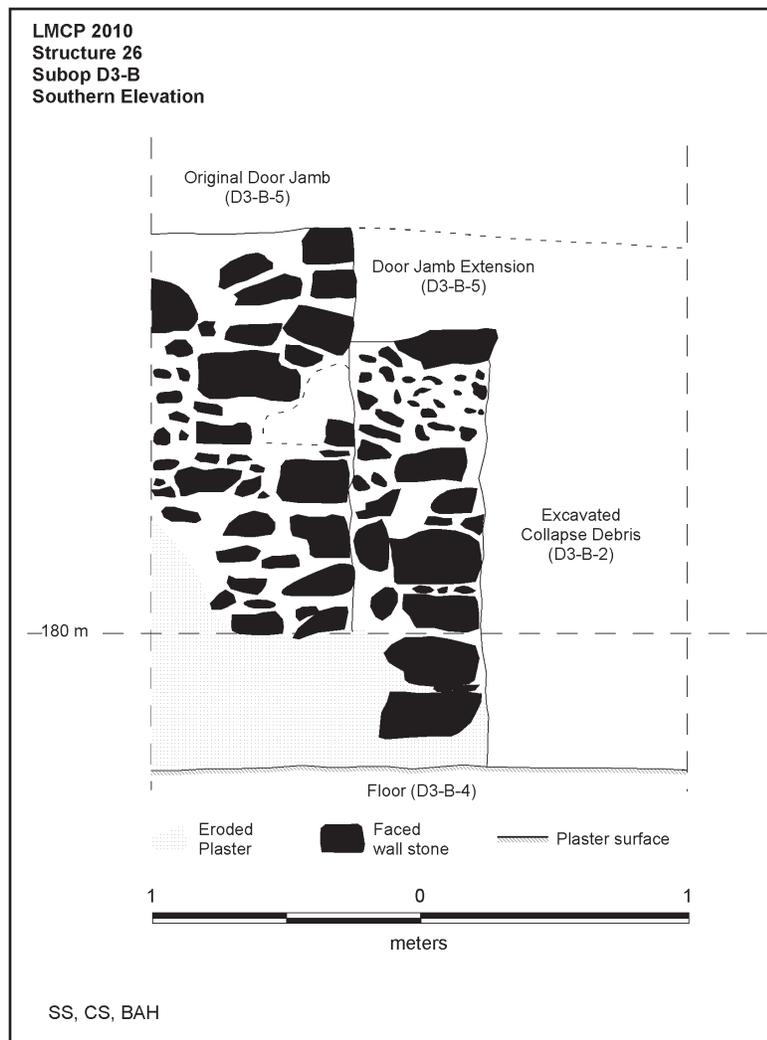


Figure 6. Southern elevation drawing of modified doorjamb (Lots 3 and 5) in Subop D3-B.

from the southern room block. Subop D3-C was oriented east-west, and it shared its northeastern corner with the southwestern corner of Subop D3-B. Subop D3-H was placed adjacent to the southern margin of Subop D3-C (Figure 7). Lot designation in D3-C was similar to Subop D3-B, where Lots 1 and 2 consisted of humus and building collapse layers, respectively, while Lot 3 was assigned to the spine wall and western doorjamb. The spine wall is well preserved in this suboperation, measuring to a height of 1.85 m above an associated plaster floor, and it is composed of cut/shaped limestone blocks averaging about 20–40 cm in length and 15–20

cm in height. Excavation of D3-C terminated at a well-preserved plaster floor, designated Lot 4. Replastering was noted in several locations near the eastern end of the unit, and the floor begins to lip upward within 5 cm of the wall. Plaster is not preserved on the wall itself.

In Subop D3-H, Lots 1 and 2 were humus and building collapse, respectively, while Lot 3 was assigned to the interior face of the Structure 26 south wall (Figure 8). The wall is preserved to a height of 66 cm above the plaster floor (Lot 4), and it is composed of faced, semi-rectangular limestone blocks. Interestingly, the floor does not meet the wall, and the wall continues beneath the floor. This suggests that the southern wall of the room may also be the southern wall of the Structure 26 platform. The separation between the two is likely due to the wall's pulling away as it gradually falls down the back slope of the mound. Combined, excavation of Subops D3-C and -H determined the south room to have measured about 2.35 m wide, suggesting the northern and southern rooms were comparable in width.

Comments

As was observed on Structure 24 (Zaro 2010a) the spine wall of Structure 26 is preserved to a much greater height than either of the outer walls. No internal architectural features were identified in either the north or south room, which is unusual given the width of the rooms. Both Structures 22 and 24 had benches in their back rooms against the back walls (see Zaro 2010b, 2010a). Benches were not documented

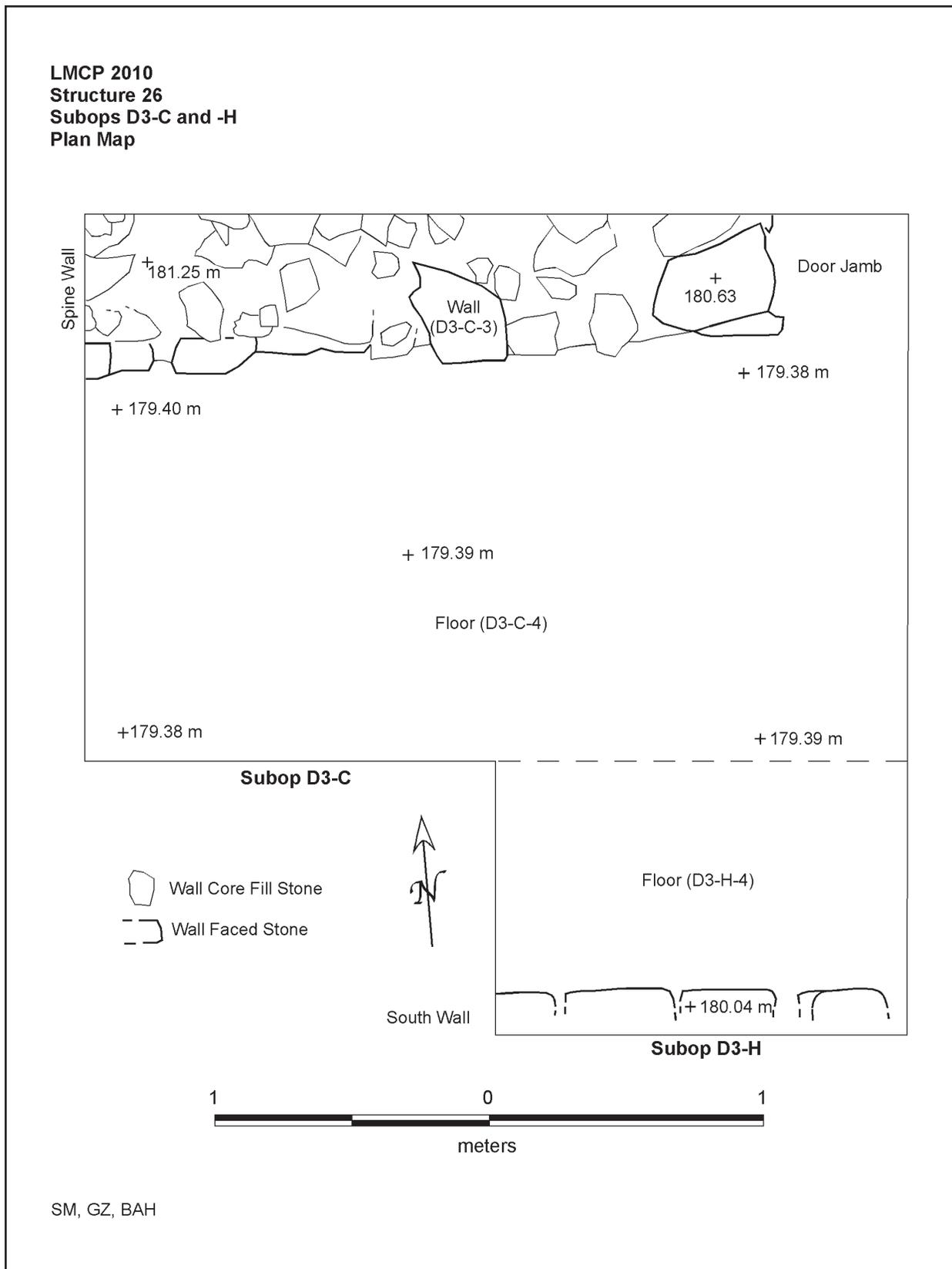


Figure 7. Plan map of exposed portion of southern room in Subops D3-C and -H.

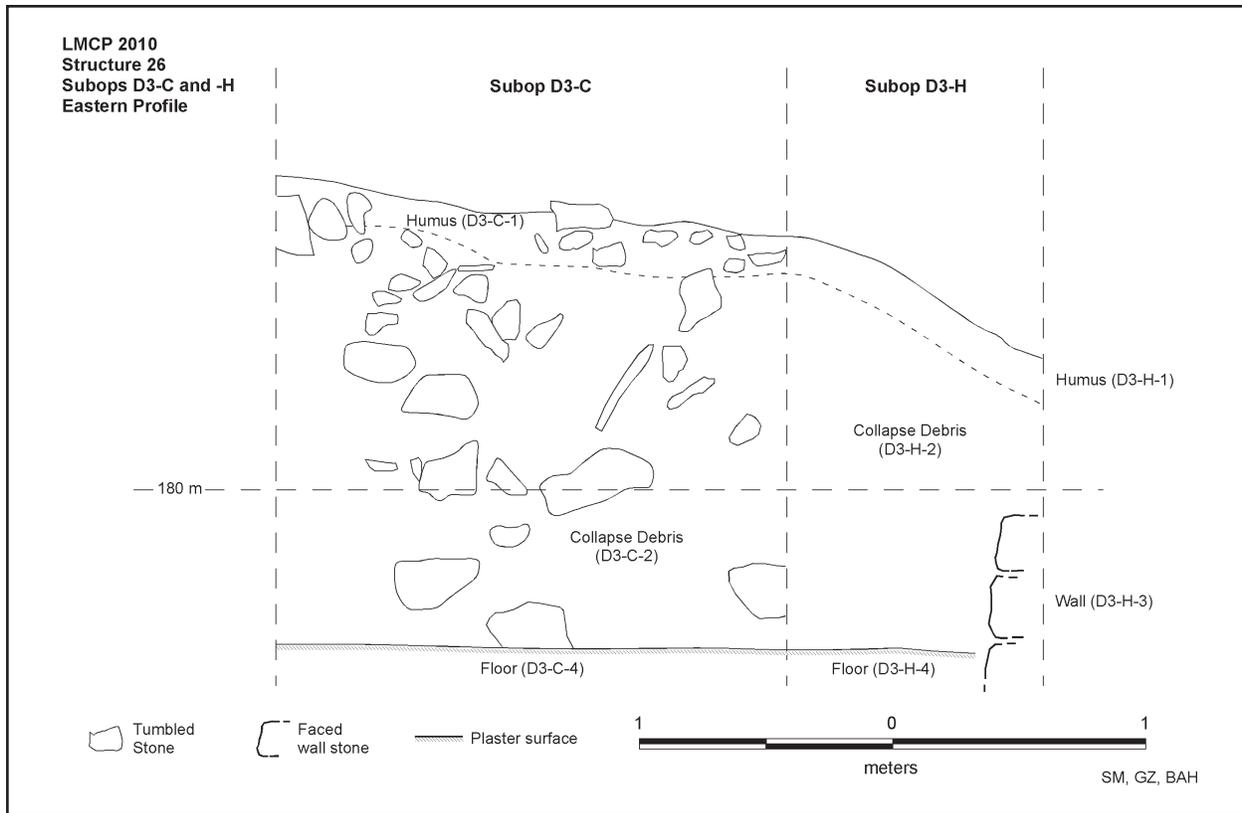


Figure 8. Eastern profile of Subops D3-C and -H.

in Structure 23's rooms either, but the rooms were much narrower (see Padilla and Smith 2010). Time constraints prevented additional excavations to determine the length of the rooms, so it is possible benches may be present on one or both ends the rooms. Based on surface morphology, it is likely that two doorways are located both east and west of the central door, as shown on Figure 1.

STRUCTURE 26 PLATFORM: SUBOPS D3-D, -E, -F, -G, AND -I

Five suboperations were placed along the base of the Structure 26 platform, near the northeastern, southeastern, and southwestern corners of the building. Combined, these suboperations defined the northeastern and southeastern corners definitively, and produced an approximate location for the northwestern corner where Structures 26 and 27 meet. The

results indicate a basal platform that measures about 31 m in length along Courtyard D, and 13 m in width along the building's eastern margin.

The Northeastern Corner: Subops D3-D, -E, and -F

Subops D3-D, -E, and -F were contiguous units along the north face of the Structure 26 platform near the northeastern corner of the mound. They were 2-x-2.5-m, 2-x-2-m, and 1.5-x-2-m units, respectively, and positioned to identify a portion of the northern terrace wall and northeastern corner of the basal platform of the structure. In each of these suboperations, the humus layer and underlying building collapse were combined into Lot 1, while Lot 2 was assigned to the basal platform wall and Lot 3 to an eroded plaster surface at the base of the terrace face. In Subops D3-E and -F, the humus and collapse above the terrace face

was not excavated. Excavation of Subop D3-D also revealed the eastern terminus of a probable collapsed/eroded stairway, designated Lot 4.

The north face of the Str. 26 terrace (Lot 2 in Subops D3-D, -E, and -F) is composed of cut limestone blocks of varying sizes (Figure 9).

Stones are not uniform in shape, and placement is not regular or patterned. Stones range in size from 5 x 18 cm to about 28 x 45 cm, with an average of about 13 x 30 cm. At its maximum, the terrace is preserved to a height of about 120 cm above the plaster surface. The corner of the basal platform is the most poorly preserved

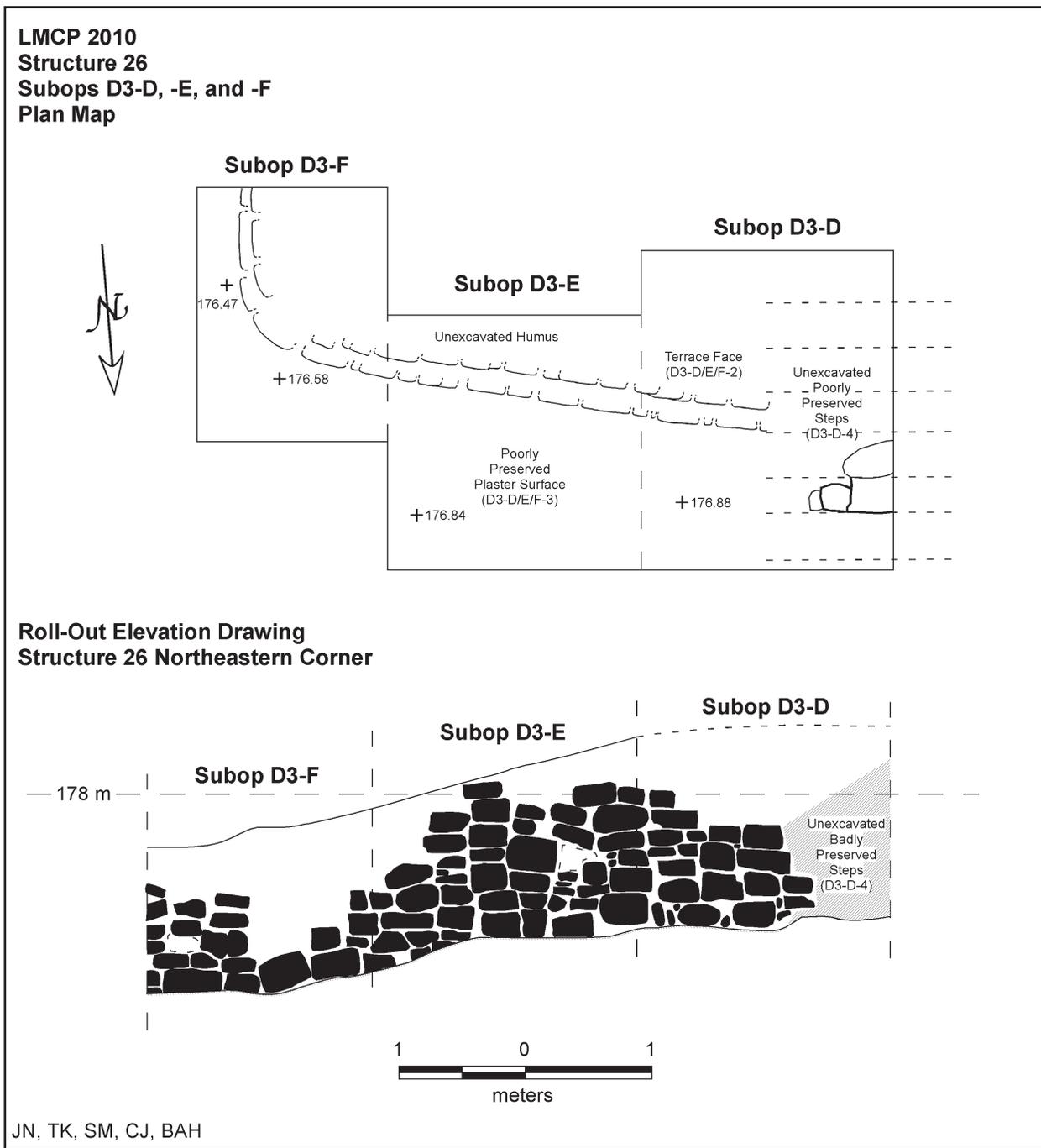


Figure 9. Plan map and rollout elevation drawing of terrace face in Subops D3-D, -E, and -F.

segment, reaching a height of only 25 cm. The face of the terrace is slightly battered—at 1.0 m high, the batter is 17 cm. The terrace face also curves slightly as it approaches a rounded corner, and individual stones used in the construction of the corner are actually rounded. During excavation of Lot 1, a number of large pieces of modeled stucco (red with elaborate designs) were recovered from building collapse contexts, suggesting the terrace face or possibly other elements of the Structure 26 façade were highly decorated.

The eroded plaster surface at the base of the terrace face (Lot 3 in Subops D3-D, -E, and -F) is better preserved at the base of the terrace and becomes progressively eroded with distance from the structure. The surface is highly eroded and irregular with cobbles either protruding from below (construction fill) or embedded in the surface. The surface lowers in Subop D3-E and continues downward in Subop D3-F. A well-preserved rectangular section of plaster surface was revealed at the base of the terrace in Subop D3-F on the east end of the building. In Subop D3-D, the surface extends westward to the probable collapsed/eroded stairway (Lot 4).

Lot 4 consisted of a very poorly preserved stairway at the western end of Subop D3-D. This feature was primarily recognized by several probable stair alignments and by the termination of the terrace face (Lot 2), which abutted the stairway. Stairs were not excavated, but construction fill was visible beneath them at the collapsed juncture between the stairs and the terrace.

The Southeastern Corner: Subop D3-G

Subop D3-G was a 2-x-6.5-m unit oriented roughly north-south and positioned to identify the southeastern corner of the basal platform of Structure 26. Lot 1 consisted of humus and building collapse debris, while Lot 2

was assigned to the eastern basal wall of the platform. The eastern terrace wall was variably preserved, though enough was intact to follow the wall during excavation and expose the southeastern corner of the platform. The wall is constructed of cut limestone blocks of similar size; most range in width/height from about 30 x 20 cm to 50 x 25 cm, and often exhibiting a width-to-height ratio of about 2 to 1. Two vertical joints or seams were also noted in the terrace wall, possibly representing a form of segmented construction or incremental additions or renovations to the platform. Excavation of the southern portion of this suboperation revealed the southeastern corner of the platform to be rounded, similar to that of the northeast. Due to time constraints, the base of the terrace wall was not reached.

The Northwestern Corner: Subop D3-I

Subop D3-I was a 3-x-3-m unit located at the Courtyard D juncture of Structures 26 and 27. Lot 1 consisted of both humus and building collapse deposits, but it was abandoned due to both time and weather constraints. Nonetheless, partial excavation of this lot may have revealed one step (stone alignment) and three additional lower steps (indicated by single stones that appeared to be in situ and were observed in profile along the western portion of the unit). These stones descend in somewhat regular fashion toward the north and likely represent the continuation of the Structure 26 stairway, lending additional support to the conclusion that the stairway extended nearly the entire length of the building. Padilla and Smith (2010) made a similar conclusion about Structure 20/23. These single stones are well-cut limestone blocks of about 25 x 25 cm (width/height) as seen in profile. Near the southeastern portion of the unit, a single stone alignment may represent a step, though no additional steps were located toward the north. However, in attempts to define the depth of this

alignment, excavation immediately north of the alignment revealed dry-laid cobble fill beneath the base of the stones, further suggesting the probability of a collapsed stairway. The point of articulation between Structures 26 and 27 was never identified, but given the likelihood of the Structure 26 stair extends past the western edge of the unit, the juncture between the two structures probably is just west of the unit. As was the case with the northeastern corner of the building, multiple pieces of modeled stucco were found in the collapse debris in Subop D3-I (Figure 10).

SUMMARY

In summary, the results of 2010 excavations on Structure 26 determined it is a tandem range building facing Courtyard D. Its basal platform measures about 31 m in length and 13 m in width, and has rounded corners on its eastern margin. The building also includes a Courtyard D-facing stairway that extends nearly the length of the building. A 1.20-m thick spine wall extends the length of the building, creating two rows of rooms that measure approximately

2.30 m in width (Figure 11). The front (north) side of the building contains a centrally located door that corresponds roughly, though not precisely, to a passageway through the spine wall, connecting northern and southern rooms. Surface indications suggest that two doorways are located both east and west of the central doorway, which would allow for up to 10 rooms in the building, if cross walls are present. At some point, the spine passageway was reduced from about 1.75 m wide to about 1.25 m wide. Along with evidence for replastering, this indicates some form of renovation late in the building's history, but not a major expansion of the building, as was documented at Structure 23 (see Padilla and Smith 2010). Additionally, modeled and painted stucco from the northeastern corner of the building and Subop D3-I near the interface with Structure 27, indicate that Structure 26 was at one point an elaborately decorated building.

Because excavations did not penetrate the building, the age of Structure 26 can only be estimated based on other data. The adjacent Structure 27's final form was apparently renovated during the Terminal Classic, based



Figure 10. Photograph of modeled stucco found in Subop D3-I.

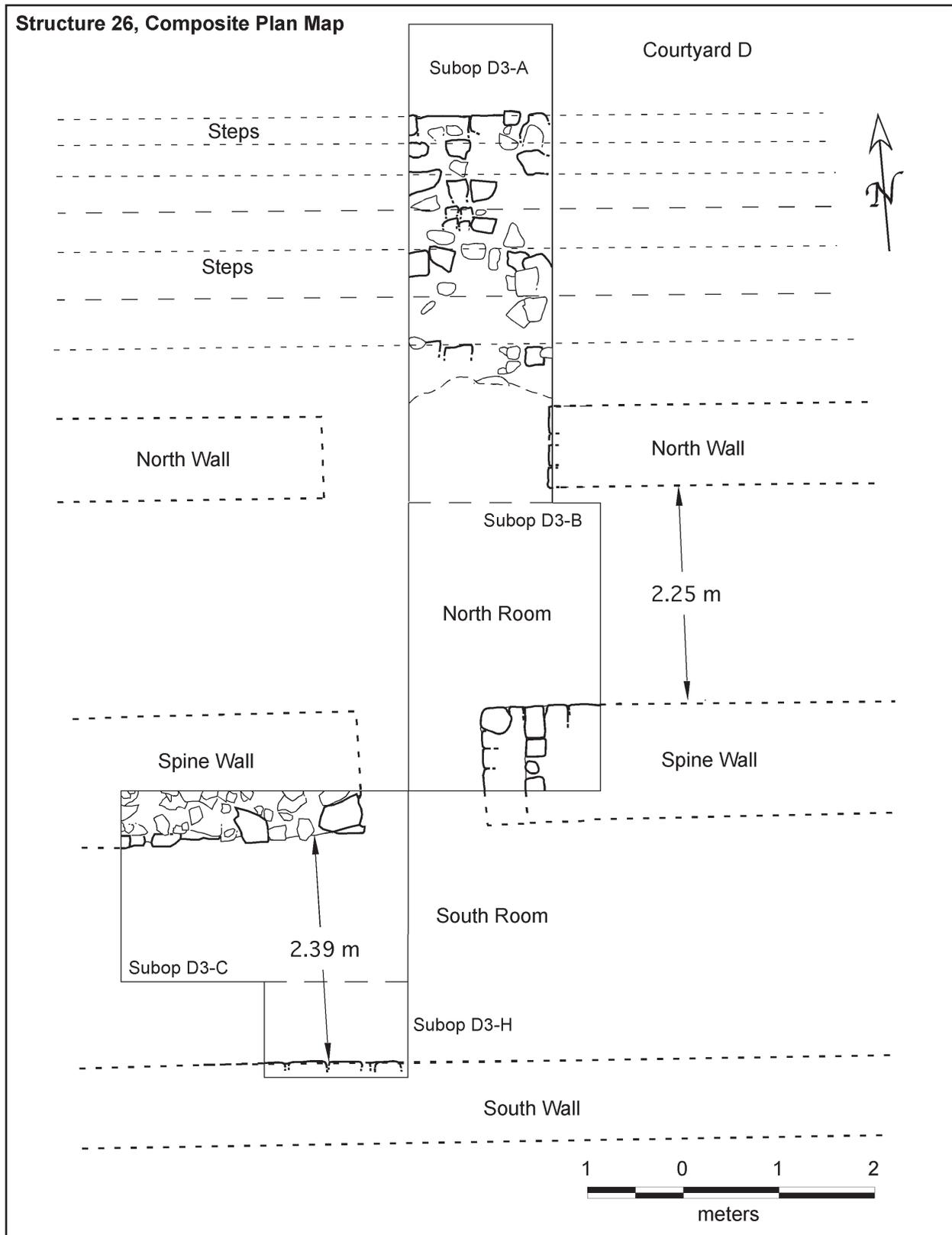


Figure 11. Composite plan map of Subops D3-A, -B, -C, and -H with projected architecture on Structure 26.

on a single radiocarbon date (Houk and Zaro 2010). The building is known to have undergone multiple renovations, and the initial construction apparently took place in the Late Preclassic (Houk and Zaro 2010). It is probable, based on excavations in Plaza B (see Houk et al. 2010) that the visible form of Structure 26 dates to the Late-to-Terminal Classic, but it is not possible to assign a more precise date to the architecture.

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