

Evaluating Imperial Consolidation through Material Culture in Western Mesoamerica, c. AD 1350-1530



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Overview

Ancient political regimes brought together diverse communities under the banner of empire. Did they operate from a centralized capital city and export cultural practices to the territories, or did they form more dynamically, with continued local practices and new adaptations?

The Purépecha of western Mesoamerica created one of the largest precontact kingdoms in the Americas, c. AD 1350-1530. It is unclear how they consolidated power over 75,000 km² (Figure 1).

Figure 1

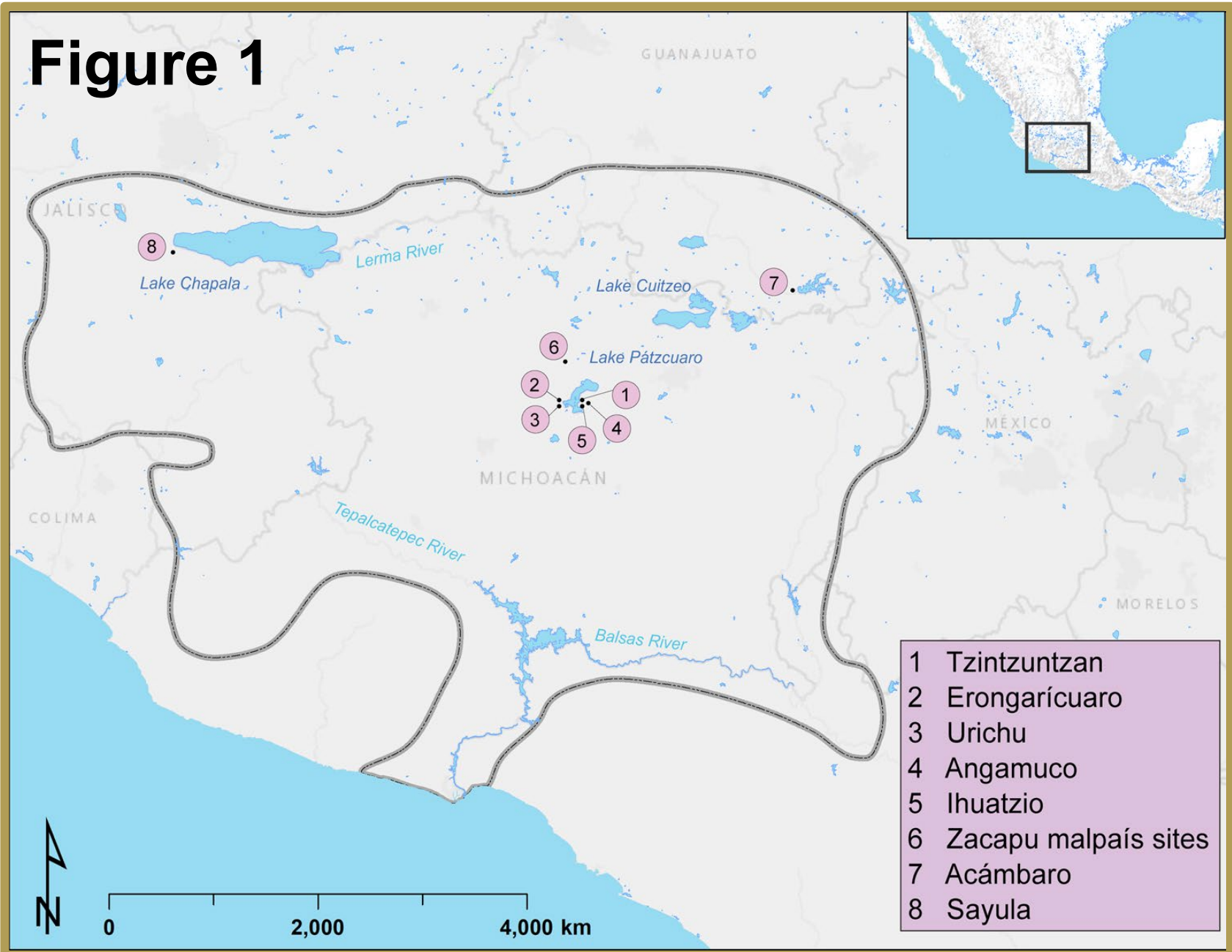


Figure 2



FYAP Activities

- 1) Visiting artifact repositories in Morelia, Mexico
- 2) Conducting ceramic analysis
- 3) Connections and sample selection for future projects (Figures 2-3)

Figure 3



Methodology

- Identified imperial style pottery used in rituals is distinctive (Figure 4).
- Standardization analysis used to understand the degree to which comparable items vary within a given cultural context.
- High variability → irregular production; low variability → centralized production.

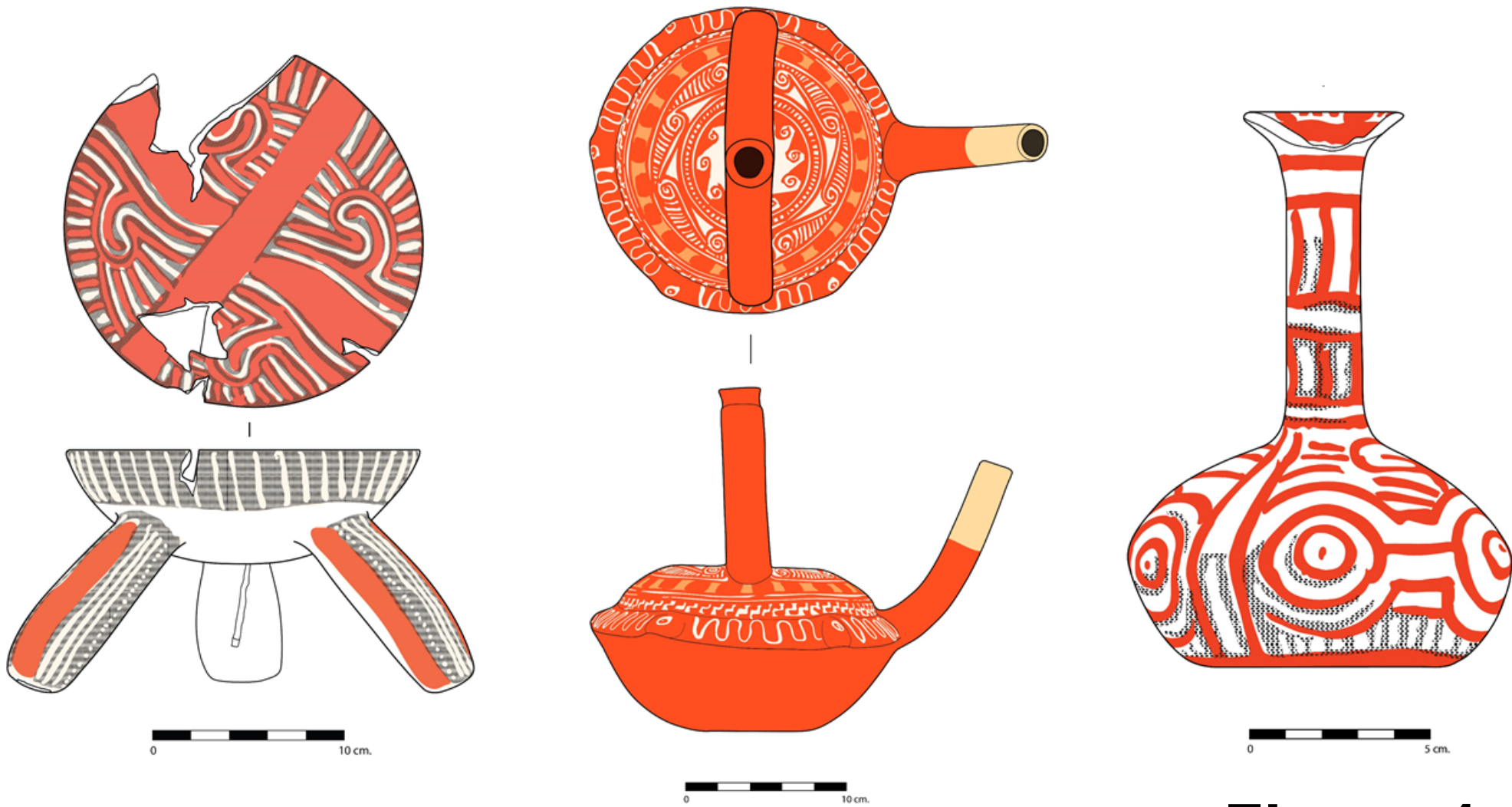


Figure 4

Analysis

CV Range (%)	Indicates
<1.7%:	use of rulers, molds, automation
1.7 – 5%:	highest possible unaided human standardization
5 – 20%:	“regularized” production
~57.7%:	completely random production
>57.7%:	deliberate differentiation

Variable	Pre-Emp	Emp
Lip Thickness (n=1358)	48%	50%
Body Thickness (n=3852)	26%	47%
Rim Thickness (n=3616)	45%	47%

Results

- Wide range of variation in vessel dimensions.
- Suggests that imperial vessels were made by existing communities, small-scale producers.
- When combined with archaeometric data, results show that the empire did not disrupt existing economic models, but they did initiate distinctive imperial style designs and associated functions.

Ongoing/ Future Work

- Submitted Archaeology NSF Grant on political consolidation strategies.
- Presentation in Morelia, Mexico, planned for Nov 2025.
- Publication in prep for *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*.

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