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*MAZAPAN STYLE* FIGURINES AT EL PALACIO AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE FOR  
EARLY POSTCLASSIC REGIONAL INTERACTIONS IN NORTHERN MICHOACÁN

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## **Abstract**

A series of figurines, known in the archaeological literature as *Mazapan style*, was recently discovered at the site of El Palacio, Michoacán, Mexico, in strata radiocarbon dated from the Early Postclassic (A.D. 900–1200/1250). Considered as diagnostic markers for Early Postclassic cultural and economic dynamics, these artifacts raise questions regarding the role of this settlement at both regional and interregional scales prior to the rise of the Tarascan state. We look at the specimens found at El Palacio through a thorough examination of the archaeological contexts, technological and iconographic characteristics, and compare them to cases from the literature. By demonstrating their local production and their association with other artifacts or iconographic traits characteristic of the Early “Postclassic international style”, we bring new elements to the definition of these artifacts and underline the capacity of local elites to connect culturally and economically with other regions of Mesoamerica.

Recent work conducted in northern Michoacán has shed light on a specific and poorly defined time period for this region: the Early Postclassic (Table 1). This area of Mesoamerica is better known for the later Tarascan kingdom, whose apogee, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries C.E., has been the focus of most archaeological research (i.e. Pollard 1993, 2012; Pollard et al. 2005). As exemplified by the studies led by the French Centro de Estudios Mexicanos y Centroamericanos (CEMCA) in the Zacapu Basin, 30 km north of the Tarascan core located in the Pátzcuaro Lake Basin, scholars have been interested in defining the origins of the Tarascan polity and the long-term history of societies in this area (i.e. Arnauld and Faugère-Kalfon 1998; Faugère-Kalfon 1996; Michelet et al. 1989; Migeon 1990). The extended surveys and excavations conducted (three phases beginning in 1983) have provided consistent information to define the chronological sequence and identify the major changes that occurred in the settlement pattern of the Zacapu Basin (Michelet 1992). One of them is undoubtedly the urbanization of the *Malpaís* of Zacapu ca. A.D. 1250 (Forest 2014).

However, the Early Postclassic occupation remains under-represented compared to the widespread occupation of the Epiclassic period, and the highly nucleated population of the subsequent Middle Postclassic phase at the region (Forest 2014; Migeon 1990; Pereira 1999). Consequently, the intermediate chronological phase (locally referred to as *Palacio* and ranging from A.D. 900 to 1200/1250: Table 1) is still being defined. Many aspects of the *Palacio* phase remain to be understood, such as the transitions from the earlier and to the later phases, accompanying changes in settlement pattern and demographic estimates, and the social, political and economic organizational structures.

Fieldwork conducted at the major and eponymic site of El Palacio (2010, 2012, and 2017) produced new datasets enabling the discussion of novel research questions (Pereira et al. 2010,

2011, 2012, 2013, 2014). Among the data acquired is the discovery of a series of figurines (Jadot 2013), known in the archaeological literature as *Mazapan style*. Mazapan style figurines have never been observed in this sector of Michoacán before and, more importantly, they constitute a strong and diagnostic marker of Early Postclassic cultural and economic dynamics among different regions from the Pacific Coast to the Bajío, as well as central Mexico (Grosscup 1961; Jimenez Betts 2018; Solar et al. 2011; Stocker 1974, 1983; among others).

The presence of this corpus at El Palacio, therefore, raises questions concerning many of our hypotheses regarding this important, but understudied settlement and is critical to our understanding of its interregional cultural and economic connections as well as the role of this site at local and extra-local scales during the Early Postclassic period. First, the analysis of the technological and iconographic characteristics as well as the context of discovery of the collection of Mazapan style figurines at El Palacio allow us to provide new insights into the interpretation of these artifacts for the Early Postclassic period. We look at their production based on manufacture process (material, technique and iconography) which enable us to discuss their nature in a cultural interaction perspective (e.g. adaptation, copy, import; as suggested in Testard 2014, 2018). Then, we discuss their possible functions, context of use, that is to say some aspects of their social lives (Appadurai 1986; Overholtzer and Stoner 2011). Second, the systematic review of collections from other regions of Mesoamerica and their comparison with the figurines from El Palacio allow us to offer a new interpretation of El Palacio's chronological and interregional place within the Postclassic world.

## BACKGROUND

### Early Postclassic in Northern Michoacán

The Early Postclassic (ca. A.D. 900–1200) is characterized by the continuation of a period of aridity that began ca. A.D. 800–900 and could be implicated in the abandonment of north-central Mesoamerica as suggested by Brown (1992), Elliott (2012), Metcalfe (2006), Metcalfe and Davies (2007) and confirmed recently by Domínguez and Castro López (2017). The important settlements that flourished in the Bajío and northern Michoacán during the Epiclassic (ca. A.D. 700–900) disintegrated and populations became almost unrecognizable in the archaeological record (Beekman 2010). Recently, Jimenez Betts (2018) synthesized the three major characteristics of the Early Postclassic period in western Mexico. The first is "the demise of the Epiclassic period Inland Northern Network", the second is "the rise of the Aztatlán network along the Pacific Coast" (see also Beekman 2010; Ramírez Urrea 2005), and, finally, the third is "an unresolved problem concerning the nature of Toltec presence in this region of Mesoamerica" (Jimenez Betts 2018:136–137). This latter issue is related to chronological questions (the anteriority of Tula over many settlements interpreted as either influenced or ruled by this Toltec capital) as underlined by Smith (2007:580–584) and a long historiography that has portrayed Tula as the center of a powerful, expansionist Toltec polity. Today, several scholars privilege a nuanced vision, where varied expressions of central highlands models (the Toltec state included) have been formulated by local polities, as part of new political legitimization strategies (Testard 2014:128). Consequently, the presence of artifacts or architectural traits that have been

traditionally associated with the direct, top-down influence of Tula has to be considered carefully and with strict chronological control.

In this complex and shifting cultural and political context, the north-central region of Michoacán has a peculiar and yet critical intermediate position as it is located south of the Bajío and approximately halfway between central Mexico/Tula and the Pacific Coast (see Figure 1).

Faugère points out that the Lerma-Santiago River and its tributaries have played a critical role in interregional connections since the Preclassic period, providing long-distance, navigable routes between central Mexico (where the Lerma River originates in the Toluca Valley), the Chapala Lake basin and the Coast of Nayarit, and where the Santiago River ends, near San Blas (Darras and Faugère 2007; Faugère-Kalfon 1996:138). The Angulo River, a direct tributary of the Lerma, runs north-to-south from the Lerma to the north-central region of Michoacán. The Zacapu Basin would, therefore, have been strongly integrated into the interregional dynamics related to this riverine route, as suggested by the ceramic data showing similarities between the north-central Michoacán and the central highlands since the end of the Classic period (Jadot et al. in press; Michelet 2013:98–99; Michelet et al. 1989; Michelet and Pereira 2000; Pollard 2009:228–229). Archaeological research conducted in the Zacapu Basin has documented important changes in settlement pattern, population mobility, and sociopolitical organization from the late Classic to the late Postclassic. Among the observations made, the Early Postclassic period (local Palacio phase, A.D. 900–1200/1250; Table 1) is characterized by a major decrease in the number of settlements and in the populations of the region. This phenomenon is partially explained by the eruption of the Malpaís Prieto volcano ca. A.D. 830–960 (Mahgoub et al. 2017). In contrast, the later Middle Postclassic period (local *Milpillas phase*, A.D. 1200/1250–1450; Table 1) is characterized by the massive urbanization of the western sector of the basin, most likely resulting from the arrival of new pre-Tarascan populations in the region (Arnauld and Faugère-Kalfon

1998). Therefore, our current understanding of the Early Postclassic occupation in the Zacapu Basin is derived from a small number of centers that persist and/or rise, such as El Palacio and San Antonio Carupo, after the disintegration of larger Epiclassic settlements (Faugère-Kalfon 1991, 1996). If San Antonio Carupo still presents architecture related to the Bajío cultural landscape, the characteristics of the Early Postclassic settings at El Palacio remain peculiar. The archaeological settlement discussed here, El Palacio, is located on the southeastern sector of a lava flow formation that is today called the Malpaís of Zacapu. As it dominates the modern town of Zacapu, El Palacio has been interpreted as the prehispanic Çacapo mentioned in the *Relación de Michoacán*: the first place in Michoacán "conquered" by the founding Tarascan lineage, the *Uacúsecha* (Michelet et al. 2005). As part of the Tarascan foundation myth, El Palacio was explored on multiple occasions (Caso 1929; Fernández Villanueva 1992; Freddolino 1973; Lumholtz 1904) before being integrated into a wide, regional study led by the CEMCA (1983 to 1996) and resulting in the first regional chronological sequence (Arnauld and Faugère-Kalfon 1998; Michelet et al. 1989). As it was first detected in the stratigraphy of El Palacio, the Early Postclassic occupation of the area became known as the *Palacio phase*. Various hypotheses have been constructed regarding the site's population and its significance, including the co-presence of various populations at El Palacio (Lumholtz and Hrdlička 1898; Pereira 1999:166–168), the transformations of space and functions of the site (Migeon 1990), and its potential major role at both local and regional scales (Michelet 2008). However, in the absence of a systematic survey and excavation undertaken at the site, these propositions remained untested.

In 2010, Pereira (CEMCA/CNRS, Project Uacúsecha) initiated a new series of investigations in the region in order to further define the pre-Tarascan urbanization of the Malpaís of Zacapu and its associated material culture (Dorison 2017; Forest 2014, 2016; Jadot 2016; Manin 2015; Pereira and Forest 2010, 2011; Pereira et al. 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015). Under the auspices of



this larger research project, several test pits were both excavated and extended in the central area of the site of El Palacio (Forest and Jadot 2018; Forest et al. 2018; Jadot 2016). The Early Postclassic strata from these excavations yielded an artifact type that had hitherto been unknown in this area – molded figurines, often referred to as Mazapan style figurines.

#### Mazapan [Style] Figurines

*Mazapan, from Teotihuacan to Tula.* As synthesized by Crider (2013), “Mazapan” refers to both a ceramic complex and an archaeological phase that directly succeeded the Epiclassic in the stratigraphy of the Basin of Mexico. Rattray Childs (2001:435) defines the Mazapan phase at Teotihuacan between A.D. 900 and 1150. The typical Red-On-Buff ceramic complex (consisting of three wares) was initially identified by Vaillant (1932) at San Francisco Mazapa (Teotihuacan) in archaeological strata located between Teotihuacan strata and Aztec strata. The typology was then finalized by Linné (2003 [1934]). Associated with the Mazapan ceramics was found a specific type of molded anthropomorphic figurine, examples of which were then named *Mazapan* figurines (Figure 3d). After being observed at San Francisco Mazapan, the complex was identified systematically at different sites in the northern half of the Basin of Mexico (Figures 3a, 3c, 3f) (Linné 2003 [1934]; Vaillant 1938) and was, according to Vaillant, filling "the gap in the history of the Valley" (Vaillant 1932:488). He also suggests that the frequent association of Mazapan ceramics and figurines with Plumbate and Fine Orange wares was evidence of interregional interactions between the Basin of Mexico and other regions of Mesoamerica (Vaillant 1938:544). In the next decade, Acosta associated the Mazapan complex with Tula, the major early Postclassic city at that time in central Mexico (Acosta 1940), although the diagnostic Red-On-Buff wares were scarce at this site (see Scott 1993:4) (Figure 3e). From this point, the Mazapan figurines were considered as a Toltec production and came to be integrated into what is

called Toltec "package" or "ritual set" (Diehl 1993:279). Consisting of a series of architectural patterns and ceramic traits associated with the Late Corral (A.D. 900–950) and Tollán (A.D. 950–1150/1200) phases, the Toltec “package” was considered to be evidence of a Toltec intrusion, before being finally dissociated from it by Healan and Stoutamire (1989:235). This debate is one facet of a wider, complex, and ongoing scholarly discussion concerning the nature of the Toltec horizon and/or intrusion in Mesoamerica (Smith 2007). Mazapan-style figurines may have bearing on this debate as they are often found outside of the Toltec core area. Stocker was the first to distinguish the figurines produced at Tula between A.D. 900-1200, referred to as *Tula culture Mazapan style figurines*, from all figurines, produced elsewhere and termed *Mazapan style figurines* (Stocker 1974, 1983; see also Edwards and Stocker 2001), or *Mazapoïde* (Guevara Chumacero and Rojas Gaytán 2004:84).

*Location of Mazapan Style Figurines.* Stocker observes that “unlike Mazapan ceramics, Mazapan figurines are not confined to the Central Basin”. Figure 2 maps the mention of Mazapan style figurine locations available in publications. The artifacts have been collected in the Tula region in Hidalgo (Healan 2012:70; Healan and Stoutamire 1989:213; Hernández Reyes et al. 1999:77; Stocker 1974, 1983), and have frequently been recovered in the western states of Jalisco (Beltrán Medina and González Barajas 2007; Kelly 1949; Meighan and Foote 1968; Solar et al. 2011), Querétaro (Valencia and Bocanegra 2013, cited in Jimenez Betts 2018:156), Nayarit (Gifford 1950; Grosscup 1961; Meighan 1976; Solar et al. 2011) (Figures 3g-h), Colima (Czitrom 1978; Jarquín Pacheco and Martínez Vargas 2007), Guanajuato (Faugère, personal communication 2018); Michoacán (Begun 2008; Filini, personal communication 2018; Jadot 2016; Kelly 1947; Lister 1949; Michelet and Pereira 2000), the Amatzinac Region of eastern

Morelos (Hirth 1977:44), Guerrero (Guevara Chumacero and Rojas Gaytán 2004; Mountjoy 2000, Pulido Méndes 2008), and Sinaloa (Grosscrup 1961; Lister 1955).

Mention of Mazapan-style figurines is relatively rare among collections from central Mexico, but specimens have been recovered in, for example, Xaltocan (Brumfiel and Overholtzer 2009:309), Cholula (Noguera 1954:154–158), and Cacaxtla-Xochitécatl (Serra Puche [ed.] consulted by Testard). Figurines are also located in the States of Veracruz (Drucker 1943), Yucatán (in Mayapan, see Ruppert and Smith 1954), and Oaxaca (Scott 1993). Haberland (1989) and Bruhns and Amaroli (2006) note their presence in Early Postclassic contexts from El Salvador (Figure 3i). Finally, occasional occurrences of such figurines have been documented from more recent contexts in central Mexico (e.g., A.D. 1300 and 1425 in Xaltocan [Brumfiel and Overholtzer 2009:318]).

*Categorization of the Figurines.* The Mazapan style figurines have been the object of very few specialized studies. Although they are mentioned in reports and published literature, there has been little effort at categorization. Further clarification of the spatial distribution of these figurines would necessitate a systematic review of all pertinent technical excavation reports. However, two recent studies have investigated these artifacts and pointed out their relevance to the study of the Early Postclassic. The synthesis by Solar and her colleagues (2011) is the contemporary reference when approaching these artifacts, their definition, and their interpretations, and Jimenez Betts (2018:135–136, 151) integrated the occurrence of Mazapan style figurines into his definition of the Aztatlán network. Both studies focus on artifacts found in West Mexico.

For the purposes of this paper, three points should be emphasized from the preceding review of our current understanding of the Mesoamerican data. First, the qualitative differentiation of Tula

culture Mazapan figurines from those produced elsewhere is difficult to incorporate within a model proposing the direct transfer and adoption of a "Toltec package." Second, the observation made by Stocker about the figurines extending "into western and northwestern Mexico although in small quantities" (Stocker 1983:10) appears to us to be an understatement. Mazapan-style figurines are encountered with greater frequencies outside of central Mexico than in the Tula region, and as distant as El Salvador. Finally, the broad acceptance of the Mazapan style figurines as a strong marker of the Early Postclassic (A.D. 900–1200) period and an indicator of short-to-long distance interregional connections along the Trans-Mexican Volcanic Belt appears to be supported by both chronological and spatial contextual information.

However, apart from Stocker's study for the Tula figurines, no typology exists for these artifacts. Since the 1930s, archaeologists have identified "Mazapan figurines" in their collection based on generic features that are widely accepted (Solar et al. 2011) without ever being systematic examined. This results in (1) a general absence of discriminating criteria for their description and classification, and (2) limited potential for their interregional comparison. Using published descriptions of Mazapan-style figurines (Edwards and Stocker 2001; Gifford 1950; Grosscup 1961; Haberland 1989; Noguera 1954; Scott 1993; Solar et al. 2011; Stocker 1974, 1983), we constructed a comparative framework in order to better contextualize those examples recovered from El Palacio. Specimens described and documented within the literature suggest that a series of features, including gender, body positioning, clothing, and ornamentation, may aid in revealing both broad trends and local variations among Mazapan-style figurines, thereby contributing to our understanding of interregional interactions.

*The Characteristics of Mazapan and Mazapan Style Figurines.* Certain characteristics (e.g. ceramic fabrics) of the Mazapan and Mazapan style figurines are rarely if ever, reported,

thus severely limiting direct comparison of many aspects of the figurines' manufacture and production location. However, others are more systematically mentioned and they form a base to initiate a comparison between collections across time and space in Mesoamerica, including the collection from El Palacio. A number of features shared across all Mazapan style figurines confirm that they belong to the same broad artifact type.

Although Mazapan style figurines are always molded, there is a wide range of variation exhibited by the final products. They all present a V-shape face and a generally rectangular body with no underlining of the waist, neck, or hips. Stocker suggests that figurine form evolved from an Epiclassic style to the typical Postclassic Mazapan style and Tula culture Mazapan figurines through a complete flattening of the figurine profile, a general geometrizing of traits, and very coarse ceramic fabrics. Female representations differ from those of males through the representation of the breast. Every known example is wearing long skirts (typically exhibiting complex patterns), earrings, and headdresses. The latter can take on a variety of shapes (one, two, or three "lobes" with two being the most common). The ornamentation depicted on figurines is likewise variable. Arm position varies, often folded up with the hands placed on the belly, the ribs, or the breast, but at times left pendant along the side of the body. Feet are sometimes absent, although more often represented by two excrescences protruding from the lower line of the clothing. The two feet can be flat (round or square and aligned with the body) or pointed (round and forming a 90° angle with the body).

There is some regional differentiation evident in artifact form. Figurines from both Tula and central Mexico are made in both female and male forms, while examples from West Mexico and El Salvador are exclusively female when gender is recognizable. Regarding clothing, we note that only female representations from western Mexico, the Basin of Mexico, and El Salvador are wearing the traditional *quechquemitl* to cover their shoulders and part of their breast. The Nahuatl

term *quechquemitl* refers to an exclusively feminine piece of clothing, made up of two rectangles of cloth and assembled in such a way that they form a V with the neck (Anawalt 1984:171; Testard and Serra Puche 2019). Although present on most of the Epiclassic figurines found at Tula, the *quechquemitl* seems to completely disappear from the Tula culture Mazapan style figurines produced at Tula in the Early Postclassic (Stocker 1983:95) (Figure 3b), an observation that clearly distinguishes collections from Tula and the rest of Central Mexico. Ornamentation, too, varies by region, with Mazapan style figurines recovered in western Mexico wearing a circular pendant or pectoral around their neck while such ornamentation has been observed less frequently in the Salvadorian examples and appears to be entirely absent from the Tula collection and from central Mexico. In contrast, body position appears to be unrelated to the geographical region of origin.

In addition to these formal attributes, figurines also exhibit regional variability in terms of their surface treatment and evidence for suspension. Paint, while always applied post-firing, varies in the colors employed. Artifacts from Tula show blue, black and white while those from central and western Mexico also use yellow (Meighan and Foote 1968:Figures 35–36, Plates 20A-G, cited in Haberland 1989:86). In contrast, figurines from El Salvador do not clearly exhibit any preserved painting. Additionally, small perforations (five millimeters on average) that might have been used for suspension have been observed in the axillary area among figurines recovered from central and western Mexico and in the headdress in specimens from western Mexico. Such perforations are absent among the Tula and El Salvador examples. This suggests that, in addition to regional styles expressed by the difference in gender, clothing, and ornamentation, there may also have been regional differences in how such figurines were used and/or displayed.

While the use of molds to produce the Mazapan Style figurines is well documented by the final artifacts themselves, the molds are either completely absent from the archaeological reports or never illustrated. The presence of molds is mentioned in Jalisco at Amapa (Grosscup 1961:392) and at Ixtapa (Mountjoy 2000:Figure 7.12), and at Tula (discovered in surface collections and associated with multiple fragments of figurines) demonstrating that this type of artifact was indeed produced at these three locations (Healan 2012:70; Healan and Stoutamire 1989:213, Figure 13.12; Hernández Reyes et al. 1999:77, Figures 19–20; Stocker 1983:281–282). However, Stocker notes that, although a high concentration of figurines fragments has been encountered during the Tula Urban Survey, the scarcity of molds (one for 38 fragments of figurines) makes the identification of production areas speculative (Stocker 1983:281).

Finally, Solar et al. (2011) point out a fundamental gap in our knowledge of these artifacts – namely, that the available literature makes no mention of figurines found in primary context. Most collections appear to be composed of highly fragmented objects found on the surface, in refuse pits, or in architectural backfills (Solar et al. 2011:69). It is also very likely that archaeologists have not systematically reported the functional and stratigraphic contexts of Mazapan style figurines. However, the fact that these figurines are rarely if ever, found in their primary depositional context but are rather recovered from middens and backfill deposits has implications for our interpretation of these materials and requires further attention. While Stocker (1974:55) interprets the systematic fragmentation of the figurines at Tula as the result of a breaking ritual, functional interpretations of these figurines before such ritual events remain largely hypothetical.

The discovery of Mazapan style figurines at El Palacio, their significance in the regional and Mesoamerican frameworks described above question our understanding of the underlying socio-political mechanisms of the Early Postclassic. Precisely because of their wide distribution, their

manufacturing technique (molding), their formal and iconographic characteristics and finally their context of deposit (secondary), these artefacts can reveal the different ways in which El Palacio integrated interregional socio-political and ritual networks. By questioning the nature of these figurines, by categorizing them as adaptations, copies or imports, we might be able to approach the manipulative processes involved in their production, as well as the different intentionalities of an individual or a group. Once the category has been defined, it can be correlated with a specific anthropological phenomenon of cultural interaction (indirect diffusion, occasional contact, itinerant craftsmen, religious mission, among others) (Testard 2014:76-86; Testard 2018). The analysis and characterization of these artefacts in the peculiar context of El Palacio can support hypotheses about its place within the Postclassic world.

## MAZAPAN STYLE FIGURINES AT EL PALACIO

### Context of Discovery

Apart from one isolated fragment discovered in the 1980s (Michelet and Pereira 2000:Figure 4a), the collection of Mazapan style figurines recovered from El Palacio is the result of three field seasons (2010, 2012 and 2017) conducted within the broader umbrella of the Uacúsecha archaeological project, directed by Pereira (CNRS, France and CEMCA, Mexico). After the first non-systematic surface collection and the partial mapping of the western area of the site were completed in 2010 (Pereira and Forest 2010), the emphasis was placed on the acquisition of



stratigraphic information in order to further understand the settlement history of the site. The site presents various monumental areas with pyramids, ballcourts and a large residential sector. Test pits conducted in 2012 have provided evidence (ceramic complex and radiocarbon dating) of the Epiclassic and Early Postclassic occupation of the site, while test pits conducted in 2017 have provided information regarding changes in stratigraphy and urban morphology during the transition from the Early to the Middle Postclassic at El Palacio. Two test pits were located in the southern area at the site and seven test pits were located in one of the larger civic-ceremonial zone organized around pyramid Y5 (Forest et al. 2018; Forest and Jadot 2018; Jadot 2013:107–124). We focus here on the test pits and surface contexts directly related to pyramid Y5 (Figure 4).

*Depositional Context.* We discovered the Mazapan style figurines in two different depositional contexts in this area: in a deposit of systematic discard, and in a backfill context where these materials were intermixed with many others from different occupation periods (Figure 5). Pyramid Y5 is located within a transitional zone of El Palacio. The southeastern area of the site was founded during the Epiclassic and was extended westward during the Early Postclassic (Forest and Jadot 2018). During the Middle Postclassic, this area of the site was again extended, this time to the north and west, and experienced a period of monumental construction related to the period of urbanization occurring ca. A.D. 1250 in the Malpaís of Zacapu. Important backfills composed of a large number of discarded artifacts from preceding and contemporary time periods were used as terracing materials (Forest et al. 2018). UT155, located east of pyramid Y5, corresponds to that construction episode and represents a leveling backfill made of high-density refuse materials (Forest et al. 2018). Yielding four fragments of Mazapan style figurines, this archaeological context resulted from the intermixing of several cultural complexes dating from the Epiclassic to the Late Postclassic (Table 2). While this archaeological context

provides support for the hypothesis that this area underwent an extensive transformation over time, it does not provide a clear chronological affiliation for the Mazapan style figurines. In comparison, a series of three radiocarbon dates (Table 2) firmly places UT52, a discard deposit located west of Y5, within the Early Postclassic period (Jadot 2013:118-124). It yielded most of our collection: 33 fragments of Mazapan style figurines as well as fine ceramic sherds and other artifacts (see below). The southern test pit UT51 has also yielded one fragment of Mazapan style figurine, located in a very compacted and partially burned stratum that likely resulted from a destruction event dated to the late Epiclassic/Early Postclassic period based on radiocarbon dates (Table 2). Finally, 13 fragments of Mazapan style figurines were collected within the systematically surveyed area (*Parcelas* 5, 6-sur, 27, 50 as shown in Figure 5), demonstrating the density of Early Postclassic artifacts in the area surrounding Y5. The Mazapan style figurines from El Palacio were all fragmented and recovered from elite or ritual contexts; none of these artifacts were recovered from their primary contexts.

*Materials Associated with the Figurines.* Alongside the Mazapan style figurines were uncovered a large sample of ceramic pots fragments, spindle whorls, pipe fragments, abundant obsidian prismatic blades and flakes, a few fragments of groundstone, charcoal, faunal remains, and, on rare occasions, fragments of human bones. The diversity and richness of the assemblage generated by the test pits excavated in the area of pyramid Y5 (e.g. fine ceramic types *Palacio Pulido*, *Palacio Inciso* and *Ciénega Rojo*, ceramic pipes, and figurines fragments) indicate the ritual and/or high-status character of certain activities in this area of the site, with which the figurines might have been associated, based on the depositional context. The associated ceramic assemblage, characteristic of the Early Postclassic in the region, shows a large proportion of

culinary pots (jars, *comales*, mortars) and service vessels (bowls and plates). Among the locally-produced ceramics dating from this specific phase, certain types seem to be relatively similar to types produced in Tula (Jadot 2016:109–110; Michelet 2013:98–99), such as the *Palacio Inciso* type's similarity to the Tula *Sillón Inciso* type (see Cobean 1990:280–281, 375–383). Another interesting fact about the assemblage is the recovery of rare Plumbate-like sherds, which raises questions concerning the interregional influences of El Palacio during the Early Postclassic. Originated from the Soconusco region in Chiapas (more than 1000 km southeast of Zacapu), the original *Plumbate* type circulated in central Mexico during the Early Postclassic, through the possible relay of Tula (Jadot 2016:334). However, the analysis of samples from El Palacio indicates that these sherds were mostly the result of local production, and therefore named *Plumbate-like* (Jadot et al. in press). Only one sherd was part of an imported pot. Finally, the brazier fragments found in the excavation of UT52 are consistent with artifacts produced in the Chapala lake area (100 km Northwest of Zacapu) during the Tizapán phase (A.D. 1100–1250; Ramírez Urrea and Cárdenas 2006:Figure 197F).

## Corpus and Analyses

*Corpus Composition.* We looked at 51 fragments of Mazapan style figurines from El Palacio (Table 3). The corpus is very fragmented but allows the identification of different body features, clothing and ornaments. Torsos and upper parts of the body, including the arms, are the best-preserved fragments along with the long skirt fragments (more robust and easily recognizable). Fragments representing headdresses, faces or heads, and feet are present but less common.

The high fragmentation of figurines does not allow for the construction of a strict typology and classification. However, the dimensions of the 51 specimens suggest that two distinct size ranges of figurines are represented (see below *Types I* and *II*). Joyce argues that objects of different sizes may be associated with different forms of agency, especially from a performative perspective (Joyce 2009:413). With this in mind, we use the estimated height of figurines to partition this collection.

Two specimens (Figures 7g-h) are almost complete figurines with the torso, superior, and inferior extremities preserved (Table 4). Their height is respectively 6.92 and 8.72 centimeters. One specimen, with two thirds of the headdress, the head, and a large portion of the torso preserved (Figure 7b), measures 6.6 cm in height. Based on observations from El Palacio and published information from Stocker (1974, 1983) and Solar et al. (2011), the heads of Mazapan style figurines account for, on average, a third of the total height of the artifact. The total height of these specimens would then reach 9.22 and 13 cm. We refer to figurines within this range of heights as *Type I*. Besides, three specimens (mostly the face) present similar features but very distinct measurements (Figures 7a, 7c, 8d), that would definitely form another group. If we apply the same proportions rules, these Mazapan style figurines reach at least 18 cm of height. We refer to figurines falling within this range as *Type II*. The mean thickness of figurine fragments from *Type I* is 0.88 and 0.98 cm for *Type II*.

*Fabrication Process.* Macroscopic analysis of the paste of the figurine fragments suggests that they are locally produced. The paste is similar to the ceramic fabrics observed at El Palacio by Jadot (2016), where a thin volcanic temper is added to the clay to reinforce the paste plasticity and the clay takes on a red-orange color when fired (Munsell color: 2.5YR 4/2 to 5YR 6/4). In the section, the paste presents a dark grey core and fine red margins resulting from a reduction

firing and rapid cooling in an oxidizing atmosphere. These characteristics are coupled with the existence of fire marks, which indicates that the molded figurines would have been fired in the open air and then removed from the fire for cooling. Such a process has been documented for other categories of culinary and ritual pottery encountered at El Palacio (Jadot 2016:448–449). The figurines are made using a single part concave mold, incised with the facial, body and ornament features so as to create low relief. Seven figurines from the collection are also decorated on the sides (Figure 6b). Frequent fingerprints (Figures 6c-d) and paste fold marks (Figure 6c) found on the undecorated backs of the figurines confirm this fabrication process. No evidence of the use of anti-adherence materials has been observed; the potter likely waited for the paste to dry slightly and retract in the mold before unmolding it. Only the *appliqué* of the two modeled schematic rounded feet was made post-molding when the clay was still plastic. No incisions or excisions were practiced even though it would have allowed the production of different types of figurines from the same mold. This observation is consistent with Stocker's assertion that the large variety of figurine features can only be the result of the manufacture and use of a large variety of molds (1974:54).

Three specimens present circular perforations of four to five millimeters, made with a small tubular tool while the paste was still plastic and before any surface treatment. Among the 12 fragments that represent figurine torsos, shoulders, and arms, two specimen exhibit this type of perforations (Figure 6e). One specimen (Figure 7c) presents a perforation located at the junction between the headdress and the shoulder, much lower than the examples from the western Mexico corpus reported elsewhere and described above. Finally, no slip was applied to the figurine surface, but the flat areas on the decorated face were roughly burnished while the paste was still leather-hard in order to even the surface irregularities created by the molding. The back

of the figurine stays unsmoothed and unadorned. In a few cases, the front presents post-firing painting in white, yellow and red (Figure 7e).

Finally, only one ceramic fragment discovered at El Palacio could be a fragment of a mold and represents part of the headdress and the ear ornaments (Figure 6a). With the exception of this fragment from the surface collection, no evidence of on-site production has been observed. This latter observation is consistent with the absence of potter tools or evidence of ceramic production in general, such as pottery discards, fails, or firing places. In addition, the terrain of the *malpais*, where El Palacio is located, does not provide the raw material required for ceramic production (e.g. clay, water, wood). The fabric of the figurine fragments, however, is very similar to the other contemporary vessel pastes at the site, for which we have arguments supporting off-site although still local production (Jadot 2016).

*Formal Analysis.* Regarding the position and body features, the figurine collection from El Palacio is entirely composed of standing, facing characters. Eight fragments represent heads, including seven faces with very consistent configurations. They all show oval-shaped eyes, with clear irises, and eyebrows depicted by arcs that join at the top of a triangular nose. The mouths have a bean-shape and teeth are either not represented, or are depicted with white painting (Figures 7b, 8a, 8d). Arms are laid diagonally across the abdomen, with hands close to the belt (Figures 7g, 8f), or crossed on their abdomen or hung alongside the torso with defined shoulders (Figure 7f), with the hands open towards the hips or towards the back (Figure 8g). Feet are rounded and projected at a right angle from the inferior border of the skirt. This profile would have enabled the figurines to stand with the help of a support. Regarding clothing, fifteen fragments of torsos preserved in the collection allow observation of the upper garment. Nine figurines wear a triangular *quechquemitl* with a simple or fringed border (Figures 7f-g, 8e-g).

Five figurines are not wearing the garment, including two with representations of the breasts (Figures 6d, 7b). One remains undefined. Half of the preserved skirts (seventeen fragments) present complex designs. Among them, the simplest are composed of triangles and lines (Figure 6c) or a series of concentric circles forming vertical and horizontal bands (Figure 8h). The remaining skirt designs are composed of more elaborated configurations, such as stepped-fret or labyrinthine patterns combined with points. This combination may represent techniques of textile weaving and ornament; and from a symbolic point of view could refer to the “serpent skin” motif (Figures 7f-h, 8e-f; Mastache 1971:47–49; see also Vauzelle 2018:290–292).

Looking at hairdos, ornaments, and jewelry, all preserved specimens have lateral vertical lines that seem to be depicting long tufts of hair, which appear to be loose hair within which concentric, circular earplugs are depicted (six specimens; Figures 7a-c, 8a, 8d). Only one figurine is wearing a necklace designed with vertical stripes and small rectangular elements (Figure 7a), known in other contexts (Toltec and Aztec) as a reference to turquoise, “brightness”, or once again, the “serpent skin” motif (Vauzelle 2018:741–742). Although headdresses are poorly preserved, five types emerge. *Type A* is composed of diagonal or vertical parallel strips (front), referring to unspun cotton (see below), one of the goddess Tlazolteotl's attributes, combined with two double-pointed circles (sides), similar to the mirror features discussed later (Figure 8a). *Type B* has a similar general configuration, but the strips are painted in white, black, yellow and red (Figure 7b). *Type C* is a simple cluster of points in relief (Figure 6d). *Type D* is a bi-lobed headdress frequently observed in Mazapan style figurines from West Mexico and El Salvador (Figures 7d-e, 8b-c; Solar et al. 2011:Figure 1c) and represented by five specimens from El Palacio. Among them, three show a *xicalcolihqui* (stepped-fret or *greca*) band and two show a striped motif, part of the fringe of the figurine (Figures 7d-e, 8b). Finally, *Type E* associates the bi-lobed shape, a double-pointed circles motif, and the vertical parallel strips (Figure 8c). This

double-pointed circles motif, a circular motif defined by two parallel contour lines with two plain circles is frequent among Mazapan style figurines from El Palacio (six specimens). Based on iconographic and ethnographic contexts from West Mexico (Solar et al. 2011), as well as iconographic and archaeological examples from Teotihuacan (Pereira and Latsanopoulos in press:Figure 9d), this feature is interpreted as a mirror on its support (the two contour lines) suspended as a necklace (the small circles indicating perforations) or worn on the headdress (see above). From this series of observations, Mazapan style figurines from El Palacio seem to represent exclusively female characters, as shown by the molding of the breast, the port of the *quechquemitl*, and fine details such as the presence of jewelry and the styles of headdresses and clothing.

*Comparisons and Symbolic Analysis.* The symbolic analysis that we propose combines the *Direct Historical Approach*, and the reference to both synchronic and diachronic sources, in particular, central Mexican from Late Classic, Epiclassic, and Late Postclassic (see Testard and Serra Puche 2019). It provides important elements of comprehension and comparisons - in time and space - of these artifacts from El Palacio.

The representation of the breast, observed among El Palacio's figurines as well as on Postclassic figurines from Chalco, and among Millian's (1981) Aztec "Group I," is considered to be a possible representation of the late Postclassic goddesses Coatlicue, Cihuacoatl, Cihualpipiltin, or a generic representation of pregnancy, reproduction, and birth giving (Klein and Lona 2009:330–337). Besides this, the frequency of the *quechquemitl* is interesting because it is often found on figurines from both the Epiclassic (Testard 2010:44; Testard and Serra Puche 2019) and the Aztec periods. During the later, the garment can be used as a social indicator and a possible glyph for female names (Anawalt 1981:129; see Séjourné 1966:225 for an alternative hypothesis).



The representation of hairstyle made of polychrome parallel lines (loose hair) is frequently found among Epiclassic figurines and possibly refers to Xochiquetzal, goddess of fertility, pregnancy, protector of mothers and patroness of weavers and embroidery (Testard and Serra Puche 2011, 2019).

Motifs and patterns of motifs repeatedly found on the Mazapan style figurines from El Palacio, such as the “serpent skin” motif, the *xicalcolihqui* (stepped-fret), the unspun cotton, the *tlapalli*, and the mirrors, could be also associated with important feminine deities.

The “serpent skin” motif, composed of points in diamond patterns, would have originated in Teotihuacan before spreading with Early Postclassic Mixteca-Puebla decorated ceramics, and becoming very common in Aztec period ceramics, figurines, and pictorial codices. It is observed on the skirts of Aztec figurines (Kaplan 1958; Parsons 1972; Stocker 1983:Plates 43, 46F, 202–203), and in the *Matrícula de tributos* (Figure 9c) where it seems to indicate that certain goods were reserved for rulers (Mondragón Vázquez 2007). Based on this motif, Stocker decided to associate the Tula culture Mazapan figurines with the goddess Xochiquetzal (Stocker 1983:160–161). Mondragón Vázquez (2007), Tate (2004) and Vauzelle (2018:285–292) assert that the “serpent skin” motif is associated with femininity, fertility rituals, and power. The second pattern is the consistent association of the “serpent skin” motif with the *xicalcolihqui* (stepped-fret or greca) observed on the figurines from El Palacio as well as on the skirts of the figurines from Chalco and in pictographic representations of skirts and capes in Postclassic codices (Figures 9b and 9c). We suggest that it represents the *xiuhtlalpilli tilmàtli*, a coat made of turquoise (real or fake) worn by the Mexica rulers (Figure 9b) and a potential reference to a process of Toltec legitimization (Anawatl 1990, cited by Vauzelle 2018:317–325). The third pattern, composed of curved lines and dots, is found on various figurines’ headdress at El Palacio (Figure 9a) (*Types A, B, and C*). It constitutes a normative Postclassic representation for unspun cotton; one of the

goddess Tlazolteotl's attributes (Sullivan 1977:8; Testard and Serra Puche 2011). The motif is documented at Teotihuacan, during the Classic period, where it is interpreted as an attribute of a protoform of the goddess Tlazolteotl (Séjourné 1966:Figures 34, 37–38). It is also documented at Xochitécatl (Epiclassic period, see Spranz 1973:223, 1978), and Tula (Early Postclassic period, see Stocker 1974:Figure 18, and type 1F). The fourth motif, the polychrome diagonal bands (headdress of *Type B*) seems to be consistent with the *tlapapalli*, a sort of clip composed of four colors and worn on the *quechquemitl* or the headdress of Xochiquetzal (Danièle Dehouve, personal communication 2018).

Finally, Solar et al. (2011) and Pereira and Latsanopoulos (in press) provide evidence suggesting that feminine figurines wearing a mirror as a pectoral or on the headdress likely represent divinities or divine ancestors. However, examples from the Mayan highlands depicting the mirror worn as pectoral are interpreted as an indicator of high status reserved for elite and/or rulers. Nevertheless, our observations of the combined iconographic characteristics of the figurines from El Palacio seem to be more consistent with the representations of feminine divinities and ritual practices than with a social status indicator.

## DISCUSSION

Although chronological issues remain important in the definition of the Early Postclassic across Mesoamerica, the Mazapan style figurines appear to be consistent markers of this time period. The collections reviewed in the literature and the contexts in which they were encountered share many technical and iconographic traits. The figurines collected at El Palacio

exhibit many of those traits, and should, therefore, be integrated into this category of Mesoamerican artifacts. Two major points can be stressed based on our review of the literature and analysis of a new collection. First, the figurines recovered from El Palacio shed new light on these artifacts in terms of technology, iconography, performative functions, and their depositional contexts. Second, integrating the study of the El Palacio corpus within a broader Postclassic context supports a better understanding of the nature and role of the site in this time period, within multi-directional interregional connections.

The Mazapan style figurine fragments from El Palacio are the first to be systematically described in terms of the process of their fabrication. The figurines' fabric is highly consistent with the local homogeneous fabrics already identified for the Zacapu Basin, indicating that these objects were produced locally. Despite the fact that molding techniques have rarely been documented in Michoacán (see Begun 2008; Marcus 2018), Jadot reconstructed the molding process and demonstrated the absence of additional techniques (except for the feet, sometimes added with *appliqué*) - the standard *chaîne opératoire* is only altered by later perforations and post-firing painting. These examples lend support to Stocker's previous suggestion that a separate mold was made for each of the unique figurines recovered. The scarcity of molds in the archaeological record might be the result of the use of perishable (and possibly disposable) dry clay for their manufacture. Despite the limitations of the published corpus, it can be suggested that the uniqueness of each figurine, the apparent investment in its fabrication (the production of a mold to obtain a seemingly unique final artifact), their systematic fragmentation, and finally their location in dense strata in backfills or middens located in ritual areas reflect a very specific and likely short-term use for most of these artifacts. It is conceivable that both mold and figurine were produced for one ritual occasion, as a unique piece, and then were broken and disposed of after the ritual (see similar cases synthesized by Marcus 2018).

The manufacture of so many different molds would have required a substantial investment of time, an observation that runs contrary to the received wisdom that the use of molds streamlined the production process is indicative of standardization, intended for mass production in an economic sense. Alternative models have been offered by scholars in Mesoamerica, figurine molding would support reproduction of valued images by non-specialized individual (enlarging ritual community participation) and state ideology carrying media (see synthesis in Joyce 2009:419–420).

Finally, the collection from El Palacio is consistent with the contexts from which other researchers have reported recovering such artifacts (Haberland 1989:82; Klein and Lona 2009:327; Marcus 1998:312, 2018; Stocker 1974:55) – highly fragmented material discovered in backfills, refuse areas, and through surface collection. In brief, secondary contexts of refuse related to accidental or intentional breaking that does not inform us of their initial location and use. However, the high concentration of figurine fragments discarded in a ceremonial area of El Palacio (e.g. 39 fragments in the four square meters of UT52) suggests a consistent pattern of secondary deposition. The multiple fragments of unique figurines were likely found as refuse within the same stratum of this ceremonial district (as in UT52, A.D. 950 and 1150) because they were “used” here before being discarded. They are also found in backfill involved in the extension of the ceremonial district (as in UT155 A.D. 1200/1250–1450), disconnected from their initial functional but still locally available.

The Mazapan style figurines from El Palacio are exclusively female characters. They present a large variety of features and iconographic motifs (e.g., headdress, *quechquemiltl*, long decorated skirt, ear ornaments and mirrors) that suggest that they might have embodied divinities associated with the feminine sphere, more specifically goddesses associated with Xochiquetzal (hairstyle, skirt, and *tlapapalli*) or Tlazolteotl (unspun cotton headdress). This suggestion is in line with the

proposition by Solar and colleagues (2011) that western Mazapan style figurines were associated with earth and fertility rituals (see also Jimenez Betts 2018:151). Furthermore, the archaeological context in which these artifacts were encountered at El Palacio, a ritual area, supports this interpretation. Alternatively, figurines may simply have been hung, as suggested by Haberland (1989:83) for the Salvadorian collection, hung and exposed on an altar, as observed by Smith (1997:79) in Morelos; or placed standing on their feet (Solar et al. 2011:67; see also Brumfiel and Overholtzer 2009:310). Such a use would be consistent with the presence of perforations for suspension and the thinness observed on at least three specimens in El Palacio collection. Systematic investigation of the thinness, the location of perforations, and the standing potential of figurines would allow further understanding of the ways in which such figurines were used and displayed and thus help to clarify their potential for embodiment and performance (see Marcus 2018).

The ritual and high-status contexts in which these artifacts were encountered at El Palacio are consistent with elite-driven activities, while the composition and high-status character of the artifact assemblage (e.g. Mazapan style figurines, Plumbate-like, and Red-On-Buff ceramic types) could indicate ties between this local elite and distant contemporaneous cultures of the Mexican highlands. Although produced locally, using local materials, and exhibiting their own iconographic combination of characteristics, the Mazapan style figurines from El Palacio seem to be part of a “ceremonial subcomplex” integrating the Early Postclassic Highland Network (see Jimenez Betts 2018:168-169, 175–180, 194–195); a local expression of a shared and wider Postclassic international style. As previously observed for the Coyotlatelco/Epiclassic phenomena in Central Mexico (Testard 2014, 2018), the emulation of local elites involved in prestige-good circulation would have resulted in the production of local "packages" composed of hybrid and recomposed recognized and iconic goods. While driving or stimulating the production

of this material culture, the local elite of El Palacio would have then integrated into a broader prestigious network, the contours of which are still in definition, but with two major poles: the west Pacific Coast and the Central Highlands. The specific distribution of Mazapan figurines across Western Mexico could suggest a diffusion of these artifacts through a highland route, rather than the Rio Lerma main route. However, the scarcity of Early Postclassic sites in the Lerma southern versant does not provide adequate data to validate one or the other hypotheses.

The Mazapan style figurines at El Palacio are contemporaneous with the apogee of both the Aztatlán and the Tula cultural spheres (Jadot 2016:110; Jimenez Betts 2018; Michelet 2001:175) and seem to share traits with figurines found in both. While many traits are more likely linked to Tula and central Mexico (e.g. the *xiuhtlalpilli tilmàtli*, “serpent skin” and unspun cotton motifs, certain arm positions, and standing feet), other evidence could be consistent with a western Mexico connection (e.g. fine and complex iconography, omnipresence of the *quechquemil*, bilobed headdresses) or with El Salvador (constellation of facial features of the “gross-type” documented by Haberland 1989:83). Mazapan style figurines at El Palacio could have been incorporated into ritual practices in different ways, depending on their size and characteristics (Joyce 2009:213). Beyond that, Jimenez Betts (2018:159) suggests that the smaller artifacts are affiliated with Tula while the larger *Palacio* Type II is more likely related to the Aztatlán complex. These two sizes (local Types I and II) as well as the other congruent characteristics of our corpus seem to support that proposition. Moreover, the presence in the assemblage of six possible cotton-weaving spindle whorls (as defined by Huster 2013; and Smith and Hirth 1988) suggests the existence of textile production at El Palacio. Hirth (1977:44) has proposed that this particular activity could form an explanation for economic interaction between Tula and the

western regions of Mesoamerica, and Jimenez Betts (2018:135) includes spindle whorls in the Aztatlán complex “package”.

If the complex interrelation of these cultural influences is obvious, the chronological resolution does not yet allow the determination of anteriority or posteriority, and thus the dynamics of influence, between Aztatlán, El Palacio and the Tula core area. The status and role of El Palacio in these dynamics remain unclear (e.g., edge, vertex of the network, producer, influencer, etc.). However, as none of those traits has been observed anywhere else in the region, it supports and reinforces the idea of El Palacio being a major center, with elites capable of driving prestige-good production and acquisition strategies, and forming an important monumental and ritual compound in the Zacapu Basin during the Early Postclassic.

Around A.D. 1250, El Palacio was, based on our excavations, deeply impacted by a demographic change resulting from the massive arrival of new populations, to the Zacapu Basin. This population shows a material culture clearly affiliated to the later Tarascan culture and is therefore considered as “pre-Tarascan”. This event transformed the site’s morphology and functions during the *Milpillas phase* (A.D. 1250–1450) and resulted in important changes in the material culture. Despite continuities in the fabrication processes, most of the ceramic complex was replaced (Jadot 2016). The Mazapan style figurines, the Plumbate-like and Red-On-Buff ceramic disappear from the Middle Postclassic assemblages (except when re-used as intermixed backfill materials), demonstrating fundamental transformations in technological knowledge as well as shifts in the interests of elites and the nature and extent of interregional connections. After an Early Postclassic system of interregional connections and networking, the populations that occupied the Basin of Zacapu shifted to a locally centered structure, material culture, and economic system that prefigured the apogee of the later imperial Tarascan system.

Despite being known across the Mexican highlands, our knowledge of Mazapan style figurines leaves much to be desired. Their occurrence should be documented more systematically, especially the contexts in which they were encountered, and their form should be described more thoroughly, thereby enabling more rigorous comparisons. Further, petrographic analyses can and should be conducted in order to determine whether these artifacts are local productions or evidence of interregional exchange. Indeed, only a larger sample of these figurines and their systematic analysis would support a clearer understanding of their characteristics and their uniqueness as a cultural manifestation. Despite these gaps in our knowledge of Mazapan style figurines, the discovery of these artifacts at El Palacio has provided a starting point from which to re-evaluate what we know about the local, regional, and interregional dynamics during the Early Postclassic, a complex and fundamental period in the history of western Mesoamerica.



## RESUMEN

Las investigaciones arqueológicas recientes llevadas a cabo en la cuenca de Zacapu, en el norte de Michoacán, brindan una nueva luz sobre el Posclásico temprano, un periodo insuficientemente definido para la región, antes del surgimiento del estado tarasco. Una serie de figurillas, conocidas en la literatura arqueológica como de estilo Mazapan, fue descubierta en el sitio de El Palacio, en varios niveles estratigráficos fechados de la fase local del Posclásico temprano (900–1200/1250 d.C.). Estos artefactos han sido considerados de manera repetida como marcadores diagnósticos de las dinámicas culturales y económicas del Posclásico temprano. Por lo mismo generan nuevas preguntas en cuanto al papel y el estatus del Palacio a escalas regionales e interregionales.

En este artículo, estudiamos la colección de figurillas de estilo Mazapan encontradas en El Palacio gracias a un examen cuidadoso de los contextos arqueológicos, junto con análisis tecnológicos e iconográficos, apoyados por una revisión sistemática de la literatura científica disponible. Al demostrar su producción local y su asociación con otros artefactos característicos del "estilo internacional" del Posclásico temprano, discutimos de su posible uso y de la capacidad de la elite local a conectarse de manera cultural y económica con otras regiones de Mesoamérica. Surgen desde luego varias vías de investigación para definir aún más el período Posclásico temprano.

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## Table titles

Table 1. Local chronology for the Zacapu Lake basin.

Table 2. Chronological phasing of excavations contexts at El Palacio (UT51–52: see Jadot et al. in press).

Table 3. Archaeological contexts and frequency of Mazapan style figurines at El Palacio.

Table 4. Dimensions and preserved body sections of the 51 Mazapan style figurine fragments from El Palacio.

<b>Periods</b>	<b>Local Phases</b>	<b>Dates (A.D.)</b>
Colonial period		After 1521
Late Postclassic	Tariácuri	1450–1521
Middle Postclassic	Milpillas	1200/1250–1450
Early Postclassic	Palacio	900–1200/1250
Epiclassic	La Joya	850–900
	Late Lupe	750–850
	Early Lupe	600–750
Classic	Jarácuaro	500–600
	Loma Alta	B.C.100–A.D.500

Table 1. Local chronology for the Zacapu Lake basin.

<b>Test pit (UT)</b>	<b>Stratum (UE)</b>	<b>Main ceramic complex</b>	<b>Calibrated dating (2<math>\sigma</math>: 95.4% probability)</b>	<b>Sample</b>
51	513	La Joya, Palacio	A.D. 876–970 (94.7% probability)	Charcoal (GrM 11622)
51	530	La Joya, Palacio	A.D. 659–869	Faunal bone (Lyon-11161)
52	553	Palacio	A.D. 1026–1052/A.D. 1081–1153	Charcoal (GrM 11623)
52	554	Palacio	A.D. 895–1028	Faunal bone (Lyon-11162)
52	555	Palacio	A.D. 972–1019	Charcoal (GrM 11625)
155	1485 niv.1	Palacio, Milpillas, Tariácuri	–	–
155	1485 niv.2	Palacio, Milpillas, Tariácuri	–	–
155	1486	Palacio, Milpillas	–	–
155	1487	Palacio, Milpillas	–	–
155	1488	Palacio, Milpillas	–	–
155	1489	Palacio	–	–
155	1490	Palacio	–	–

Table 2. Chronological phasing of excavations contexts at El Palacio (UT51–52: see Jadot et al. in press).

Location	Type of operation	Chronology (for the strata with figurines)	Interpretation of context	Type of material collected	Mazapan style figurine fragments
<i>Parcela 5</i>	Non-syst. surf. collection	Epiclassic, Early/Middle Postclassic	Civic-ceremonial		1
<i>Parcela 6-sur</i>	Syst. surf. collection	Epiclassic, Early/Middle Postclassic	Civic-ceremonial	Ceramics, including small modeled objects, lithics (andesite, obsidian), bones (fauna, human)	8
<i>Parcela 27</i>	Syst. surf. collection	Epiclassic, Early/Middle Postclassic	High-status residence (?)		1
<i>Parcela 50</i>	Syst. surf. collection	Epiclassic, Early/Middle Postclassic	Civic-ceremonial		3
UT51	Stratigraphic excavation	Epiclassic/Early Postclassic	High-status residence (?)	Ceramics, including small modeled objects, lithics (andesite, obsidian), bones (fauna, human)	1
UT52	Stratigraphic excavation	Early Postclassic <i>See calibrated 14C dates</i>	Civic-ceremonial Midden/Backfill	Ceramics, including small modeled objects, lithics (andesite, obsidian), bones (fauna, human)	33
UT155	Stratigraphic excavation	Early and Middle Postclassic <i>14C dates expected.</i>	Civic-ceremonial Midden/Backfill	Ceramics, including small modeled objects, lithics (andesite, obsidian), bones (fauna, human)	4
TOTAL					51

Table 3. Archaeological contexts and frequency of Mazapan style figurines at El Palacio.

Body sections preserved	Frequency	Height (cm)		Width (cm)	
		Min	Max	Min	Max
Headdress	8	1.95	3.18	1.39	3.15
Head – Headdress	5	3.46	6.6	3.87	5.65
Face	4	2.45	5.54	3.8	4.43
Torso	7	2.26	4.3	2.38	4.39
Torso and/or superior members	3	2.2	3.81	1.36	3.35
Torso – superior and inferior members	2	6.92	8.72	5.58	7.56
Torso – inferior members	2	5.03	7.64	5.06	5.81
Inferior members	7	1.46	5.17	1.39	5.57
Feet	8	1.22	2.66	1.94	5.1
Indeterminate	5	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	51				

Table 4. Dimensions and preserved body sections of the 51 Mazapan style figurine fragments

from El Palacio.



## Figures captions

Figure 1. Location of El Palacio in Northern Michoacán and the two large Early Postclassic cultural spheres of Aztatlán and Tula. Map M. Forest.

Figure 2. Locations of published Mazapan style figurines in Central and West Mexico:

Mazatlán (1); San Felipe Aztatan (2); Amapa (3); Santiago Ixcuintla (4); Chalcalilla-San Blas (5); Punta Mita (6); Tomatlán (7); Ixtlán del rio (8); La Playa (9); Etzatlán (10); Los Valentines and El Coralillo (11); Tuxcacuexco (12); Playa del tesoro (13); La Campana (14); La Peña (15); Tizapan (16); Cojumatlán (17); Apatzingan (18); Don Martin (19); Delta del Balsas (20); Ixtapa (21); El Palacio (22); Urichu (23); El Banco (24); TR7 (25); El Cerrito (26); Tula (27); Xaltocan (28); San Francisco Mazapa (29); Chiconautla (30); Yautepec (31); Amatzinac (32); Cholula (33). Map M. Forest.

Figure 3. Mesoamerican molded feminine figurines from Classic to Early Postclassic periods: (a) Xolalpan figurine from Teotihuacan (Est. de Mexico) (Solis 2009:Cat. No 202); (b) Epiclassic figurine from Xochitécatl (Tlaxcala) (Proyecto Xochitécatl INAH-UNAM, INAH Cat. No 10-547438); (c) Mazapan figurine from Teotihuacan (Museo de sitio de Teotihuacan, INAH Cat. No 10-336516); (d) San Francisco Mazapan figurine (Vaillant collection, American Museum of Natural History, New-York, Cat. No: 30.1/ 2935); (e) Mazapan Figurine, type 3, from Tula (Hidalgo) (Stocker 1983:64, Pl. 44A); (f) Mazapan Figurine from Chiconautla (Est. de Mexico) (Stocker 1983:113, Pl. 72); (g) Mazapan Figurine from Punta Mitla (Nayarit) (Solar et al. 2011: 66c); (h) Mazapan Figurine from Amapa (Nayarit) (Grosscup 1961:393, Fig. 1A); (i) Mazapan Figurine from Tacachico (El Salvador) (Bruhns and Amaroli 2006:31, Fig. 3). Drawings J. Testard and M. Forest.

Figure 4. Map of El Palacio and location of excavations. Map M. Forest.

Figure 5. Locations of figurines encountered in surface collection and excavations in the pyramid Y5 area. Map M. Forest.

Figure 6. Examples of Mazapan style figurines and mold from El Palacio with interesting technological marks: (a) mold fragment (*Parcela 6-sur*, surface); (b) fragment decorated on the sides (*Parcela 6-sur*, surface); (c-d) fragments presenting fingerprints (c: UT52, UE555) and paste fold marks (d: UT52, UE554) on the undecorated backs; (e) fragment presenting perforations (UT155, UE1488). Photographs by E. Jadot and M. Forest, plate E. Jadot.

Figure 7. Examples of Mazapan style figurines from El Palacio showing iconographic characteristics: (a-e) heads and headdresses fragments (a: UT52, UE554; b and e: UT52, UE555; d: UT52, UE552; c: *Parcela 50*, surface); (f-h) figurine's bodies and indumentary (UT52, UE554). Photographs by E. Jadot, plate J. Testard and E. Jadot.

Figure 8. Examples of Mazapan style figurines from El Palacio showing iconographic characteristics: (a-d) heads and headdresses fragments (a: *Parcela 50*, surface; b and d: UT52, UE554; c: *Parcela 6-sur*, surface); (e-g) figurine's torsos and *quechquemiltl* (e: *Parcela 6-sur*, surface; f: *Parcela 50*, surface; g: UT52, UE554); (h-i) figurine's skirt and feet (h: UT52, UE554; i: UT155, UE1485). Drawings by S. Eliès, plate J. Testard and E. Jadot.

Figure 9. Examples of comparative diachronic evidences for figurines' indumentary analysis: (a) Tlazolteotl headdress with "unspun cotton" motive on band and sides parts (detail from *Codex Borbonicus*:Folio 13); (b) *Xiuhtlalpilli tilmàtli* cape showing xicalcolihqui and diamond-shape designs (detail from *Codex Ixtlilxochitl*:Folio 33); (c) *Xicolcolihqui* and "serpent skin" motives on cotton *huipil* and skirt tributes to Tenochtitlan (detail from *Matrícula de Tributos*:Folio 10;

drawings S. Eliès); (d) Frontal mirror on Teotihuacan Metepec figurine, Natural Museum of New York (drawing by N. Latsanopoulos, from Berrin and Pasztory 1993:231, Figure 98 left). Plate J. Testard.

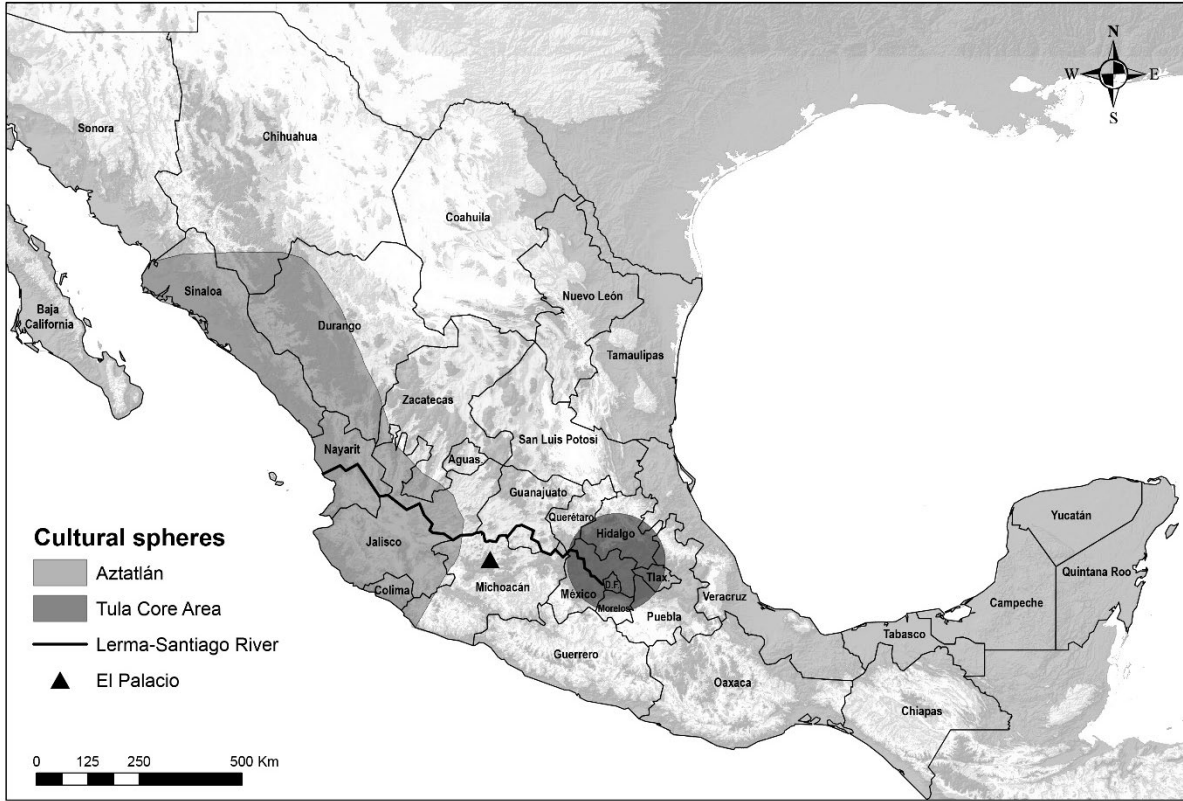


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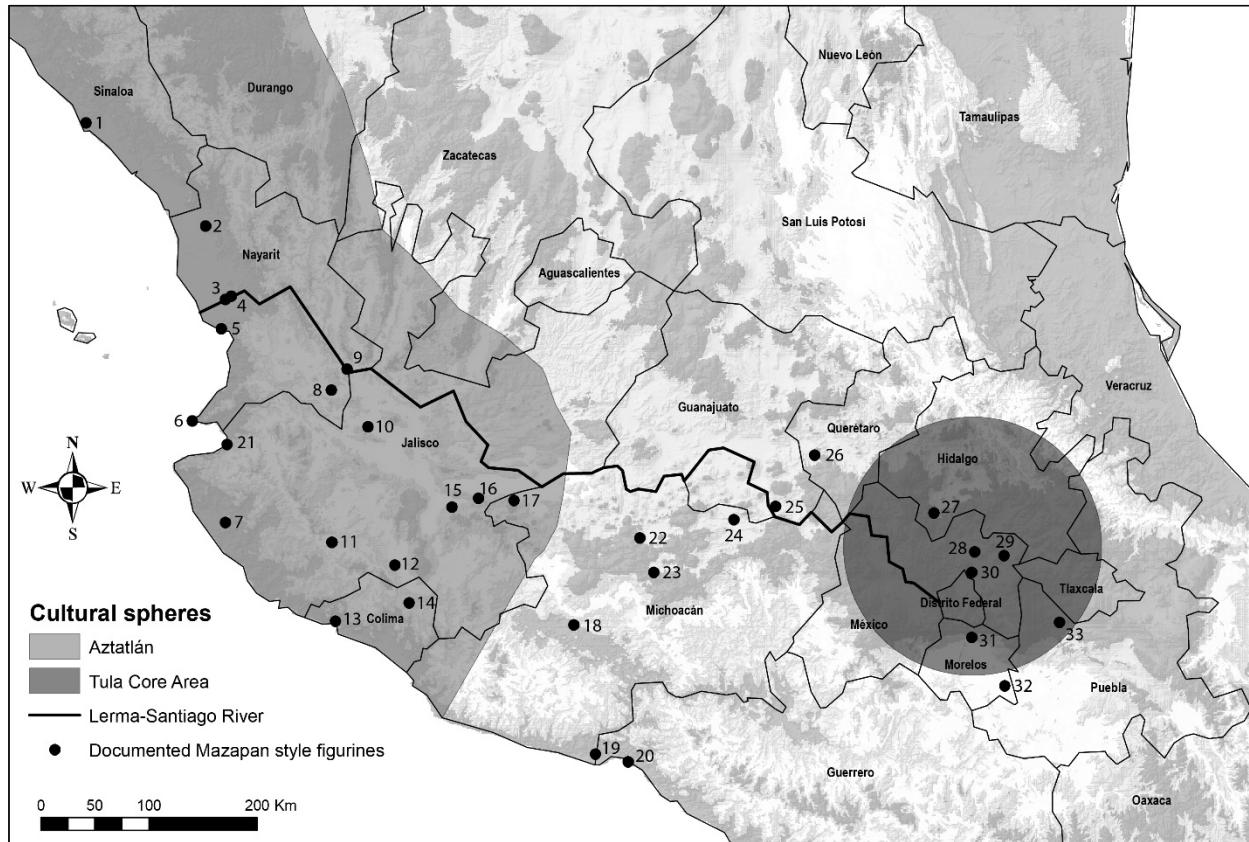


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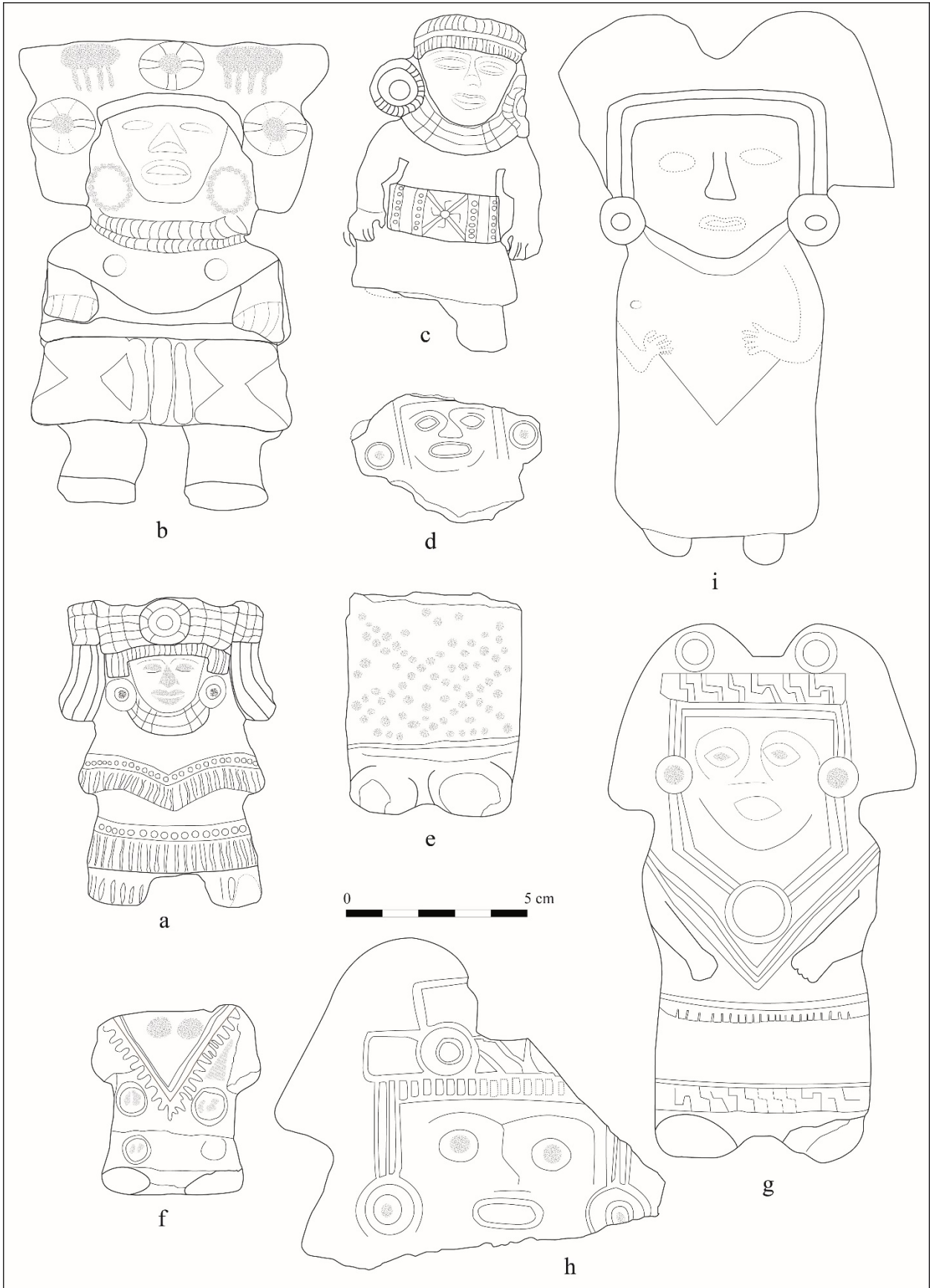


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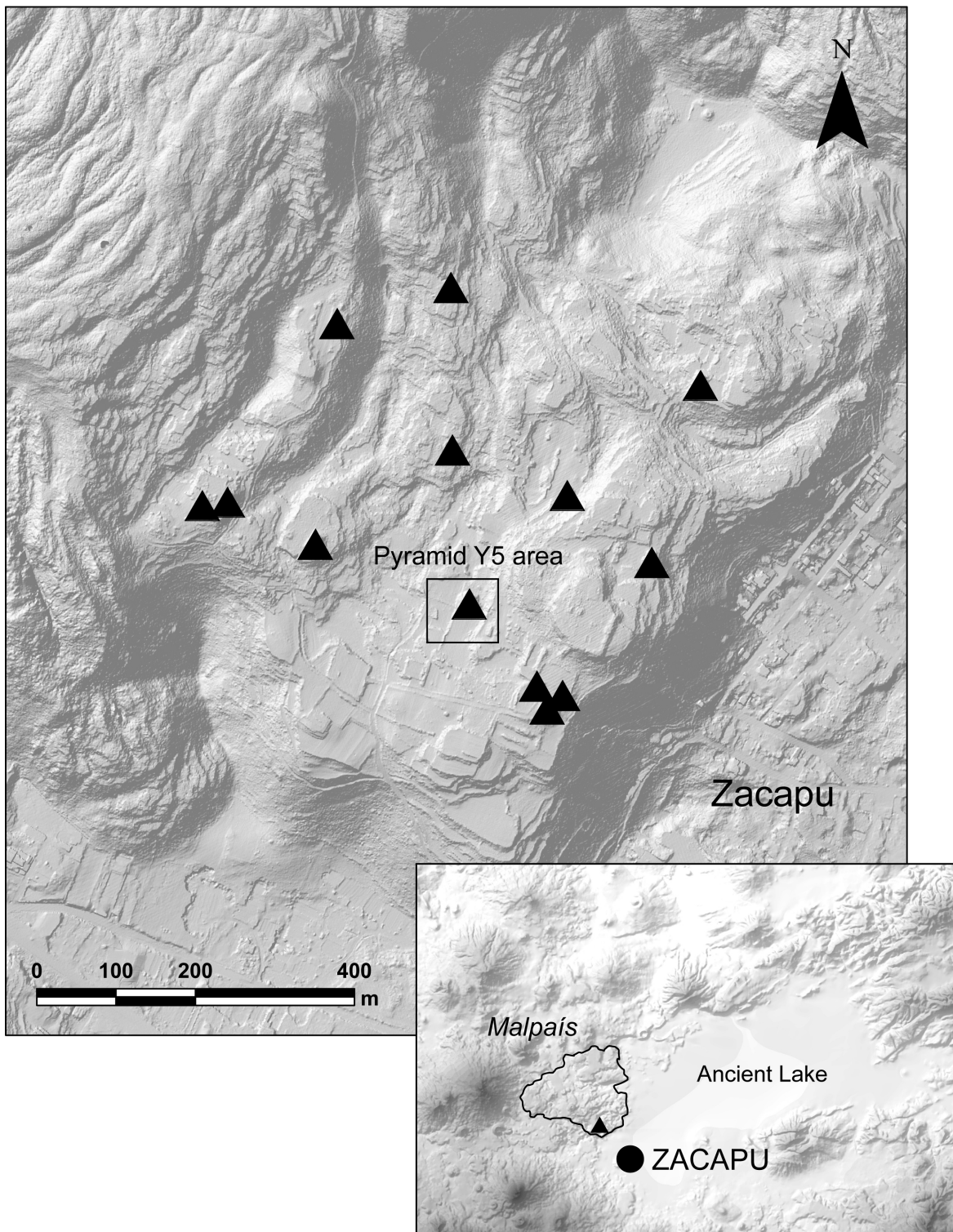


Figure 4. Location of El Palacio and the excavated area in the Basin of Zacapu. Map M. Forest.



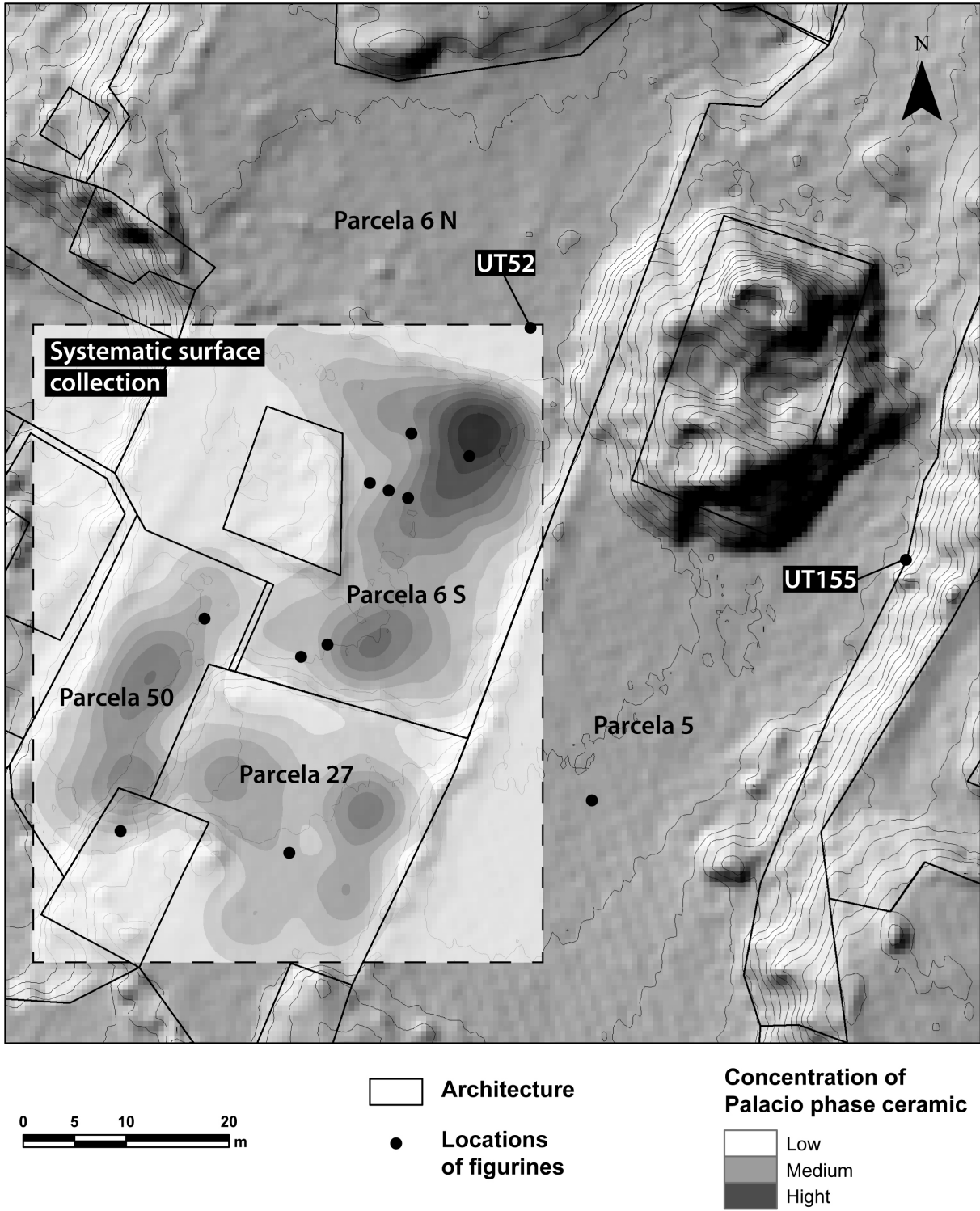


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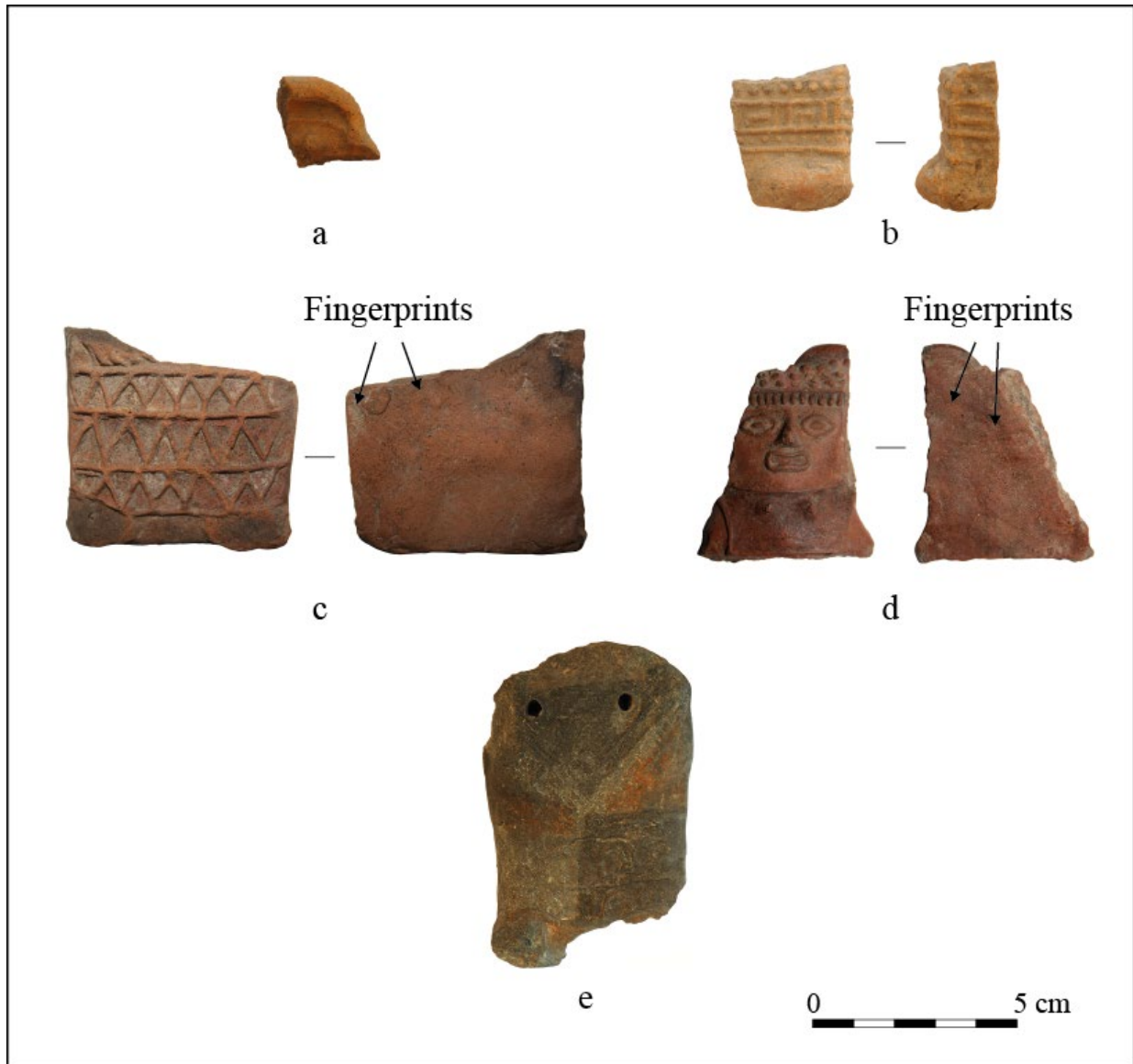


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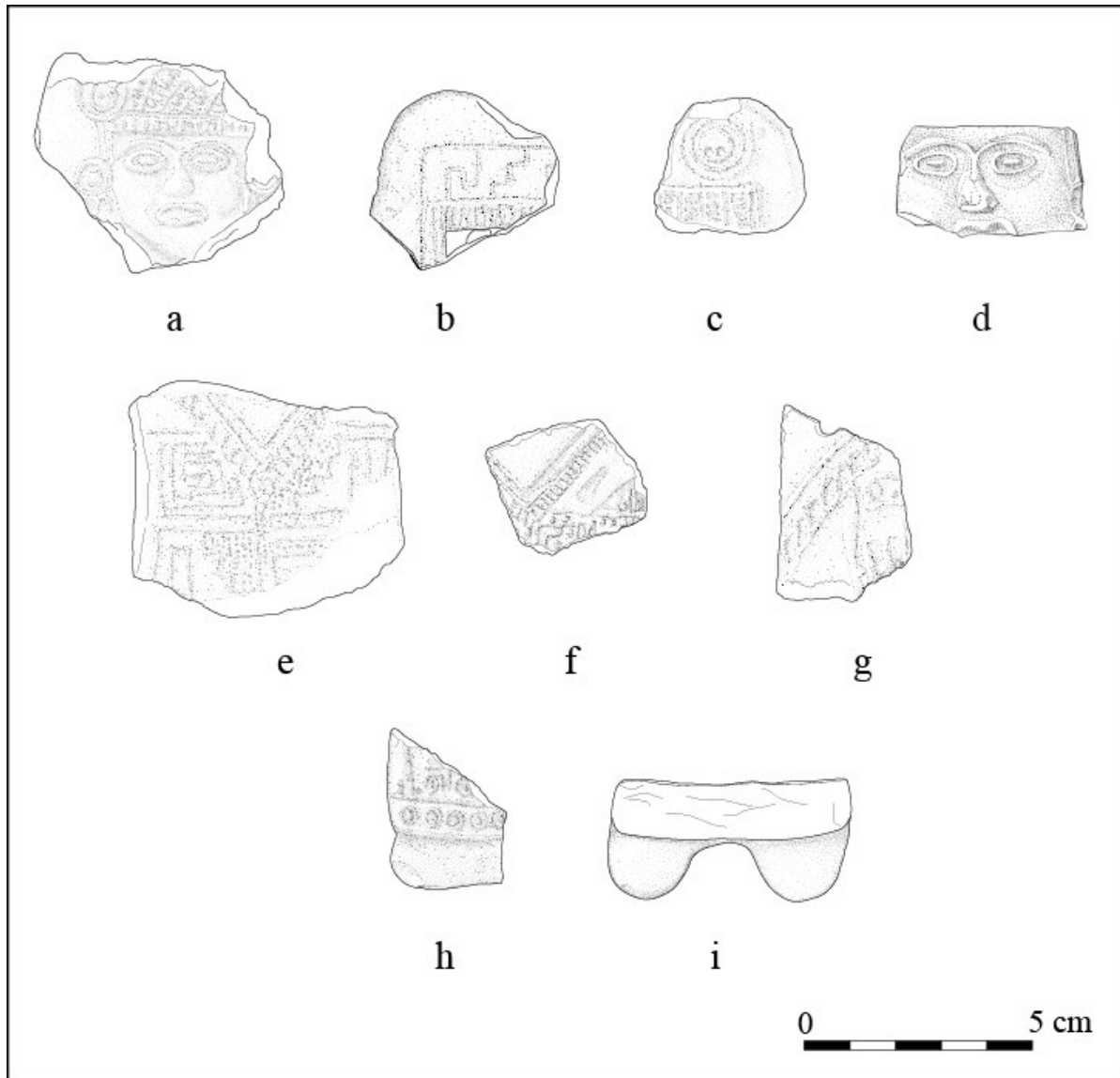


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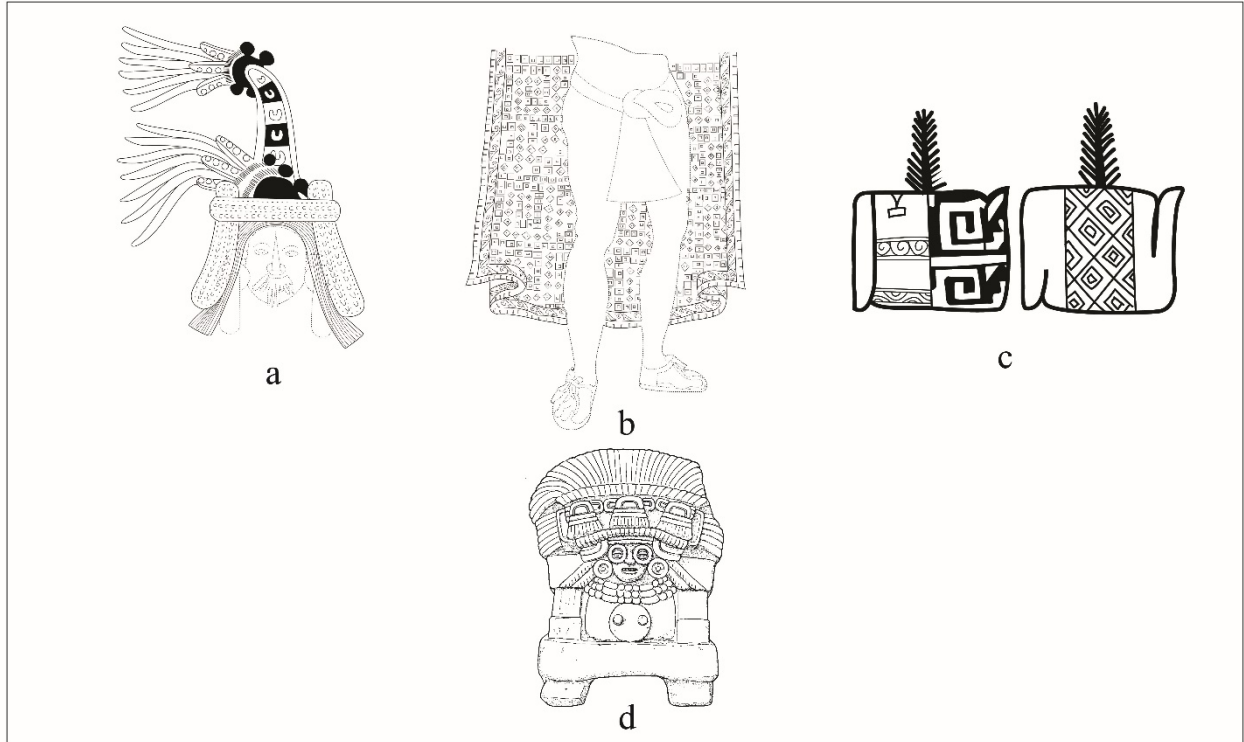


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