

**FRAGRANT CERAMICS: INDIGENOUS INDUSTRY IN EARLY COLONIAL
TONALÁ**

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Introduction

In the first half of the seventeenth century, many Spanish aristocrats consumed and collected foreign goods at astounding rates. Consumers saw their acquisitions frequently documented in painterly representations, sometimes commissioning work specifically to immortalize their purchases. Through these Spanish still life paintings, called *bodegones*, Spaniards put their worlds on display. Appearing in some *bodegones* were red burnished ceramics from Tonalá in the Spanish viceroyalty of Nueva Galicia, now present-day Mexico (figure 1). Their appearance in still life paintings and Spanish private collections suggests that these were prized commodities in Spain and evidences the success of the Tonalteca at adapting their Indigenous ceramic traditions into forms that were coveted and collected by their Spanish imperial leaders.

Across the globe, Spanish trade linked colonial territories with the mainland, ensuring that products, such as Tonalá red burnished ware, flowed routinely into their peninsula's ports and cities. Finding a thriving market for ceramics in Spain, Tonalá ceramicists responded to imperial demands for Indigenous goods by re-establishing an ancient practice of crafting earthenware vessels. Originally serving a religious, funerary function, the Tonalteca transformed their wares into secular products, satisfying Spanish consumer tastes. Skilled mainland artists then incorporated these ceramics into their *bodegones*, depicting them amongst everyday objects, food, and other imported luxury items. In some works, the inclusion of red burnished ware from Tonalá reinforces the representation of foreign objects as metaphorical symbols of imperial power, appealing to upper class Spanish consumers who wanted to show off their wealth and assert their social position. At the same time, the marketing of these goods to Spaniards by

Indigenous artisans from Mexico speaks to their own agency and attempts at economic survival under Spanish colonial rule.

Depicting the spoils of a flourishing colonial empire, Spanish artist Antonio de Pereda (1611-1678) expertly renders a collection of imported goods, including Tonalá ceramics, in *Still Life with a Clock* from 1652 (figure 2). Arranged along a flat, green table, at the left, a variety of spiny seashells, perhaps from Indonesia, fan out before a pair of ceramic pitchers from Tonalá. Their burnished finish and distinct styles and sizes speak to the skilled potters who produced the redware ceramics. Moving to the right, walnut shells and hazelnut cobs from Persia meet a swatch of black silk from China. The silk lays next to a petite Portuguese cup called a *púcaro* and enhanced with silver embellishments. Its form loosely mimics the Tonalá vessel. Behind this, Venetian glassware appears against a red curtain backdrop, presumably dyed with cochineal from the Americas. In the foreground at the far right, a Chinese porcelain plate holds a Spanish ceramic jug; its handles echo the one on the Tonalá pitcher. Through the artist's intentional representation of imported objects, the underlying power dynamic of Spanish imperialism shifts into focus, reinforcing the use of still lifes as a colonial tool.

This mid-seventeenth century painting speaks to the acquisition of Native products by Spaniards, but it also highlights the infiltration of Tonalá ceramics into Spanish ways of life. In this thesis, I explore this and other works to assert Tonalá red burnished ware as objects of Indigenous agency. By examining the Indigenous adaptation and Spanish consumption of these burnished ceramics, I argue that the transformation of Indigenous wares from bichromatic religious vessels (figure 3) into monochromatic secular redware (figure 4) is an act of transculturation and an indication of cultural resistance under Spanish colonial rule. Moreover, I treat Tonalá redware as material culture and these burnished ceramics as symbols of

socio-economic status and power, both for their Tonalteca creators and Spanish collectors, whether they were used as religious offerings in the tombs of the deceased in Tonalá (see figure 5) or as utilitarian objects in the homes of peninsular Spaniards. The artistic representation of red burnished ware in Spanish still lifes provides evidence of Indigenous agency, positioning the Tonalteca artisans who created the objects as contributors to European culture. In this thesis, I situate red burnished ware from Tonalá within complex transcultural relationships between Indigenous Tonalteca, Spanish colonizers in Western Mexico, and elite consumers in Spain.

These ceramics are part of a wider global and historical ceramic tradition, which is evidence of their transcultural nature. I center Tonalá, Jalisco, in Western Mexico as a site of ceramic production and compare their products to *púcaro* earthenware vessels made in Estremoz, Portugal at the same time (figure 6). In doing so, I explore Tonalá redware's infiltration into Spain to understand the earthenware's desirable qualities for Spanish consumers. This desirability lead to the Tonalá burnished ware's popularity exceeding that of the Portuguese wares. An examination of different ceramic techniques including slip application and polishing methods enhances our understanding of Iberian taste in ceramic consumption. In this thesis, I examine a variety of burnished redware forms to establish Tonalteca ceramic skill and adaptability, which I see as a mode of cultural resistance under Spanish colonialism.

This focus on red burnished ware is not to disregard the presence of black wares also being produced in Tonalá and exported to Spain. On the contrary, an exploration of black wares might support Tonalteca ceramic adaptability, but there is a lack of blackware representation in still lifes to visually support their incorporation into Spanish visual culture as compared to the redware from Tonalá. For example, a Tonalá blackware cup at the Museo de América, dated to the second half of the seventeenth century, has a restrained form and painted decoration that are

unlike any monochromatic redware vessels produced in the first half of the seventeenth century, suggesting that blackware may have been a late colonial advent (figure 7). As such, analyzing red burnished ware establishes their prominence in Tonalá's ceramic industry in the early colonial period.

The colonial-era red burnished ware from Tonalá are products of transculturation which I view as an active form of Indigenous agency. Art historian Anna Grasskamp states that "the presence of two or more cultures" constitutes a transcultural object.¹ Monica Juneja's notion of transculturation as products flowing into and out of local, global, and national stages accounts for the mobility of these items through different cultural contexts.² In furthering their concept of transculturation, I define the multi-step process as one culture adapting to create a new object with the intention of generating economic demand through the object's infiltration and material consumption in a secondary culture or more. This process manifests through the creation of new redware vessels born out of both Tonalteca and Spanish culture, enabling the Indigenous community's economic survival through the ceramic's export to Spain.

A material analysis of clay from Tonalá in West Mexico reveals how its quality attracted Spanish attention and aided Tonalteca ceramicists in creating a desirable product that superseded Portuguese wares that were popular at the time. As Edward S. Cooke argues, "certain characteristics make ceramics particularly valuable as works of art: their sculptural possibilities...capacity for individual expression, and ability to satisfy a very wide market, from high-status luxury goods to everyday food preparation vessels."³ Tonalá ceramics were

¹ Anna Grasskamp, "The Matter of Cultural Exchange: China, Europe, and Early Modern Material Connections," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Material Culture Studies*, ed. Lu Ann De Cunzo and Catharine Dann Roeber (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 275.

² Monica Juneja and Christian Kravagna, "Understanding Transculturalism: Monica Juneja and Christian Kravagna in Conversation," in *Transcultural Modernisms*, ed. Fahim Amir, et al. (Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien, Sternberg Press, 2013), 26.

³ Edward S. Cooke, *Global Objects: Toward a Connected Art History* (Princeton University Press, 2022), 26.

particularly valued because after the clay was formed into a vessel and fired, the ceramic's contact with water emitted a distinct fragrance evocative of wet earth after rainfall, a phenomenon that today is called 'petrichor.' Spanish consumers found this aroma highly appealing, believing that its use as a water vessel also imparted a pleasant flavor to imbibe. The clay found in Portugal was limited in terms of finishes and while this ceramic produced the scent of Iberian earth when it got wet, geological factors in Tonalá's clay allowed for its unrestricted manipulation into burnished ceramics and the effusion of West Mexican earth, a smell that was new to Spanish consumers. Thus, the clay's specific olfactory properties that came to be promoted in the colonial era enhanced the value of Tonalá redware over their European counterparts, facilitating their mass production in the seventeenth century.

A useful comparison are Andean *q'eros* from South America. Conservator Emily Kaplan analyzes the material makeup of Andean ritual drinking vessels called *q'eros* that blend Indigenous and Spanish techniques in their early colonial production.⁴ Her work highlights how the use of locally sourced pigments such as cochineal, a dye desired by the Spanish, allowed Andean peoples to preserve their traditional vessel form by adapting their decoration to include Spanish polychrome techniques. Before the Spanish arrival, *q'eros* were decorated with abstract, geometric designs. However, in the sixteenth century, Andean artisans made *q'eros* with increasingly elaborate pictorial representations to meet Spanish interests. Similarly, the survival of Indigenous ceramic techniques through the production of colonial red burnished ware indicates the Tonalteca's awareness of Spanish interest in their regional clay, which they adapted into Iberian forms for their culture's preservation.

⁴ Emily Kaplan, et al., "The Qero Project Conservation and Science Over Time," *Research and Technical Studies Group Postprints*, no. 3 (2012): 3, 17.

The red burnished wares from Tonalá also had their own social lives and cultural impacts that can be traced through transculturation. As explained by Arjun Appadurai, objects are commodities of differing exchange value, complete with their own “social life” status, with the distance an object travels and the number of cultural contexts it encounters determining its worth and social connections.⁵ Unlike European ceramics, the Tonalá redware’s lack of painted decoration emphasized its Indigenous origins within a Spanish context. Moreover, the vast geographical distance between Nueva Galicia and Spain must have caused Spanish consumers to view these burnished water vessels as ‘exotic’ objects, altering their transcultural identity to reflect a Spanish imperial agenda. Nonetheless, their new ‘social life’ in the hands of elite Spaniards laid the groundwork for their transcultural success by their Indigenous makers.

As an imported commodity, Tonalá red burnished ware actively infiltrated Spanish society as a multifunctional water vessel that improved Spanish leisure activity. Historian Serena Dyer furthers this idea of agency by referring to objects as “vibrant agents” that create connections across time and space.⁶ Her perspective underscores how an object’s multitude of effects on a consumer, including sensorial experiences, speaks to its quality and desirability. The ceramics activated a consumer’s five senses. Its burnt red clay, native to Tonalá and burnished to a sheen by Indigenous hands, arrests the gaze immediately with the brightness of its material. Filling a ware with water prompts the release of its earthy aroma whose experience is further heightened by the sound of low crackling as the liquid exudes from the porous clay. Holding a vessel as water cools and moistens the clay may even alter the temperature of a consumer’s hands, and drinking the water out of the earthenware imparts a pleasant clay flavor, unlike any Iberian ware. Eating a broken sherd of Tonalá redware may have provided a different taste,

⁵ Arjun Appadurai, “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value,” in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3, 15, 44.

⁶ Serena Dyer, “State of the Field: Material Culture,” *History* 106, no. 370 (2021): 285, 289-90.

evoking dry earth rather than rich wet clay. Due to the popularity of these special qualities, the Tonalá redware came to be regarded as luxury goods, symbolizing elite socio-economic status.

By incorporating European forms into their pre-existing ceramics tradition, the Tonalá community used adaptation to survive the first centuries of Spanish rule. I see this process as a form of cultural resistance. Historian Gilda Hernández Sánchez shows a similar process in her study of Mexica pottery traditions in the colonial era.⁷ Mexica potters working within Mexico City, the capital of New Spain, used ceramic production to preserve their cultural identity. At the same time, archaeologist Enrique Rodríguez-Alegría reveals how Spaniards used these Indigenous-made vessels to establish advantageous relationships with the regional Mexica leaders.⁸ His examination of Spanish consumption patterns underscores how colonial ceramics contributed to one's socio-economic standing in New Spain. However, this was an internal process, and these works largely remained within Mexico City. In contrast, the Tonalá ceramics traveled to the Iberian peninsula, infiltrating private collections and Spanish *bodegón* paintings. This trans-Atlantic phenomenon reflects the success of their transculturation, revealing the Tonalteca contribution to Spanish culture and artistic traditions.

By examining Tonalá ceramics through transculturation, I center Indigenous voices in Spanish colonial history and put Mexico and Spain in dialogue with each other. This is similar to the “periphery to the center” approach that Marcy Norton takes in her analysis of chocolate and tobacco, two Latin American agriculture products exported to Spain.⁹ Norton extends beyond a colonialist narrative to show how Indigenous producers actively contributed to European society via these commodities. The Tonalá red burnished wares were commodities that resonated with

⁷ Gilda Hernández Sánchez, *Ceramics and the Spanish Conquest: Response and Continuity of Indigenous Pottery Technology in Central Mexico* (Brill, 2011), *passim*.

⁸ Enrique Rodríguez-Alegría, “Eating Like an Indian: Negotiating Social Relations in the Spanish Colonies,” *Current Anthropology* 46, no. 4 (2005): 551-573.

⁹ Marcy Norton, *Sacred Gifts, Profane Pleasures: A History of Tobacco and Chocolate in the Atlantic World* (Cornell University Press, 2008), 12.

mainland Spanish society in much the same way Norton shows for chocolate and tobacco. However, as creators of manufactured wares, the Tonalteca actively contributed to Spanish culture through the agency expressed in the making of their wares. In considering the local town of Tonalá at the global level, I counter the colonial narrative that privileges the contributions Spain made to Mexico and instead assert West Mexico's influence over Spain.

I. Tonalá Ceramic Artistry and Survival under Spanish Colonization

Burnished ceramics were created in Tonalá, Jalisco from the pre-hispanic period into the early colonial period. Utilizing a variety of techniques native to Western Mexico, the ancient Tonalteca inhabitants forged ceramics as a show of artistic agency. Unearthed by archaeologists, ceramics found in earthen tombs suggest a larger religious function and social stratification in Tonalá during the Classic Period (400-800). Despite the arrival of Spanish colonizers upending their empire's authority in the Late Post-Classic Period (1200-1519), Tonalá retained its ancient ceramic traditions, leaning on burnished ware to preserve their cultural origins.

Tonalá was one of many towns with a robust pottery industry flourishing in ancient West Mexico during the Classic Period. Located in modern-day Jalisco, the historic town of Tonalá is about ten miles southeast of the capital city, Guadalajara and a little over 300 miles west of Mexico City (see figure 1). Situated in the Atemajac Valley, Tonalá lies north of Lake Chapala, the largest lake in Western Mexico. The Sierra Madre mountains stretch the length of the region, creating dense lake basins, lush valleys, and a string of active volcanoes. Clay deposits cover the area as a result of volcanic ash weathering down over time, providing an ample resource for ceramics. Highly skilled Indigenous artisans found a source of vocation through manufacturing ceramics in Tonalá, but many of these ceramics ultimately served a funerary purpose.

Tonalá's burnished ceramic production had close ties with their religious customs through a regional mortuary practice known today as shaft tombs. Appearing in the modern-day states of Jalisco, Nayarit, Colima, and northern Michoacán, the shaft tomb practice involved burying the elites of society with funerary offerings, including ceramic wares, in cavities dug deep into the earth (see figure 5).¹⁰ Archaeological evidence has revealed that some of these burnished ceramic

¹⁰ Robert B. Pickering and Cheryl Smallwood-Roberts, eds., *West Mexico: Ritual and Identity*, exh. cat. (Gilcrease Museum/Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, 2016), 1, 18.

bowls and other vessels held different foods and beverages, including traces of a hallucinogenic drink made from the plant species *Datura*, pointing to their ritual usage.¹¹ It was believed that these offerings would support a deceased person in the afterlife while highlighting their social status in waking life. Ceramic vessels underpinned the storage and display of these food and drink items, while figurines point to additional religious significance.

Tonalteca potters crafted a wide variety of ceramic forms in the Classic Period, as evidenced by shaft tomb excavations in the Tonalá area. For example, tombs included different types of vessels such as bowls, jugs, and chalices, as well as assorted figurines characterized by their pointed noses and long faces (figure 8), and architectural models.¹² A model of a shaft tomb in the Museo Regional de Guadalajara displays an assemblage of these Indigenous ceramics, allowing visitors to see their original religious context (figure 5). For example, it includes an assortment of bowls, tripod vessels, and figurines and shows how they were placed on the earth. As Robert Pickering and Marta Cabrero argue, figurines of varying personas were often included in the tombs, perhaps representing the deceased's vocation or acting as spiritual protectors in the afterlife.¹³ This display reveals how these ceramic offerings were arranged closely around a deceased individual, giving them ownership over a collection of burnished ware that denoted their powerful social standing. Tonalá's participation in the shaft tomb practice reveals how their pottery may have marked social hierarchies and maintained the balance of life and death through religion.

With few remains from the Late Post-Classic Period, a bichromatic burnished ceramic bowl likely made in the Classic era serves as a useful example of red and cream slip application,

¹¹ Pickering and Smallwood-Roberts, *West Mexico*, 63.

¹² Gonzalo López Cervantes, "El montículo de Coyula: un rescate arqueológico," *Estudios Jaliscienses* 32 (1998): 15; Richard F. Townsend, "Before Gods, Before Kings," in *Ancient West Mexico: Art and Archaeology of the Unknown Past*, ed. Richard F. Townsend (The Art Institute of Chicago, 1998), 125.

¹³ Robert B. Pickering and Marta Cabrero, "Mortuary Practices in the Shaft Tomb Region," in *Ancient West Mexico: Art and Archaeology of the Unknown Past*, ed. Richard F. Townsend (The Art Institute of Chicago, 1998), 86-87.

a defining element of Tonalá's pre-hispanic artistic style (see figure 3).¹⁴ Archaeologically excavated from a shaft tomb in the Tonalá region and now on display at the Museo Regional de Guadalajara, the bowl's small, shallow form gleams with a burnished finish. Its red and cream detailing divide the interior and exterior into four sloping quadrants of varying design, exemplifying Tonalá work and their likely religious connotations. On the interior, two of the four sections are full of tiny squares, alternating like a checkerboard. On either side, six-petaled flowers done in cream push toward the edges of their patterned block. Around the inner rim of the bowl, two rows of red flecks create a contrasting border on a cream backdrop. On the exterior, the pattern switches back to form a red border around the outer lip with cream key-like imagery over top. Solid cream-colored quadrants fill the space between two checkerboard sections running towards the base. Made with distinct red and cream slips, this bowl typifies Tonalá's bichromatic approach to wares with religious significance.

The bichromatic bowl's geometric pattern evokes notions of duality, a common cultural element in the region during the Classic Period and beyond. In Mesoamerican cosmology, the concept of duality revolved around opposing forces that formed a larger whole. Such oppositions included life and death, light and darkness, and male and female.¹⁵ These dualities were seen as a way to highlight the essential nature of both aspects in maintaining life's balance. This concept manifests in art and iconography across Mesoamerica, spanning the Olmec, Maya, and Aztec civilizations.¹⁶ Through this lens, the bowl's complementary quadrant design of two opposing patterns falls in line with principles of duality. As a whole, the quadrant's four parts also point to the idea of four directions and a center forming the axis mundi, a concept widely accepted in

¹⁴ Slip is the term for the mineral pigment painted on a dry ceramic before firing it to a hardened state. It may be a color other than the shade of the clay.

¹⁵ David Carrasco, *Religions of Mesoamerica*, 2nd ed. (Waveland Press, 2014), 81.

¹⁶ Carrasco, *Religions of Mesoamerica*, 81.

Mesoamerican cosmology. This slip application reveals how the Tonalteca organized their worldview and viewed their social structure, as expressed through ceramic artistry.

While the the food or drink that once filled this vessel is unknown, it is possible that this bichromatic bowl contained a ritual beverage or its ingredients. The discovery of *Datura* in some shaft tomb vessels aligns with a broader Mesoamerican custom where shamans or priests ingested fermented beverages or hallucinogens to spiritually connect with ancestors or deities to provide communication between worlds.¹⁷ As such, shamans were an essential presence for a deceased person's successful journey to the afterlife. A figurine excavated from a Tonalá shaft tomb likely represents a shaman in the process of mixing a psychoactive drink ahead of a ceremonial trance (figure 9). Although photographed in black and white, the contrasting tones on the bowl between the figure's legs indicates its bichromatic design. As such, red and cream slipped vessels, such as the bichromatic bowl from the Museo Regional, appear to have aided in a person's journey from the physical to the spiritual realm in the shaft tombs.

Red and cream slip is also commonly used for decorating Tonalteca figurines. A standing male-female pair from the Mermoz Galerie in Paris serve as a useful comparison (see figure 8). Shown on the left, the female figurine's red clay skirt has white horizontal stripes on one half and small white 'x's' covering the other side, similar to the cream flower shape in the bowl. The quadrants on her circular earrings resemble the bowl's interior design with white patterning over red slip. Although slightly faded, it is possible to make out the same style on the male figurine's earrings. This fluidity between ceramic forms indicates aesthetic consistency and shared religious resonance. The ceramic figurines' retrieval from a shaft tomb further speaks to their spiritual function. As such, decorative elements made with red and cream slip appear to be

¹⁷ F.J. Carod-Artal, "Hallucinogenic Drugs in Pre-Columbian Mesoamerican Cultures," *Neurología* (English Edition) 30, no. 1 (2015): 43, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nrleng.2011.07.010>.

religious in nature in ancient Tonalá. Based on the inclusion of the bowl in a shaft tomb and its balanced imagery pointing to duality, a bichromatic composition likely has ties to religious beliefs related to the afterlife.

The religious nature of the pre-hispanic Tonalá bowl can be traced back to the Indigenous finishing techniques that determined a ware's cultural value. Indigenous potters did not utilize glazes to seal their wares, but instead relied on manual polishing to achieve a glaze-like surface.¹⁸ Simpler smoothed pieces had use in the kitchen, while burnished wares were reserved as funeral receptacles for shaft tomb offerings.¹⁹ While skilled at smoothing and polishing, the Tonalteca excelled in burnishing, an advanced polishing technique executed on dry ceramics over an application of clay slip.²⁰ Achieving the unique glossy finish seen in the bowl required a skilled “bruñidor,” or polisher, who could work a smooth stone, such as a pebble or piece of jade, over the vessel's surface to prepare it for a single low firing.²¹ As Edward S. Cooke explains, “Low firing contributes to its fragility—it breaks rather easily—and results in a rather porous membrane that allows moisture to condense on the exterior through capillary action... Therefore, earthenware vessels and plates need a glasslike coating (a glaze) or a burnished surface to function as containers for fluids.”²² By burnishing wares for religious purposes, the Indigenous potters increased the ceramic's functionality to keep any ritual beverages, such as the *Datura* drink, from leaking during a ceremony or after the day of interment. In this way, the ceramic

¹⁸ Glaze is a mixture of water, glass, and clay particles that adheres to a ceramic's surface during firing. It creates a hard and durable coating, making a ceramic waterproof. Glaze comes in a variety of colors and finishes.

¹⁹ Carod-Artal, “Hallucinogenic Drugs,” 25.

²⁰ Alexander von Wuthenau, *Terracotta Pottery in Pre-Columbian Central and South America* (Greystone Press, 1969), 24; Otto B Schöndube, “Cerámica Bruñida en el Occidente de México,” in *Tonalá: Sol de Barro*, ed. Alberto Ruy-Sánchez Lacy (Banca Cremi, 1991), 27.

²¹ Alberto Ruy-Sánchez Lacy, “Introducción,” in *Tonalá: Sol de Barro*, ed. Alberto Ruy-Sánchez Lacy (Banca Cremi, 1991), 20; Schöndube, “Cerámica Bruñida,” 27, 30. The low firing temperature still used by Tonalá workshops today is around 600 degrees Fahrenheit, though there was likely greater fluctuation in open-air kilns used in the pre-hispanic era.

²² Cooke, *Global Objects*, 28.

manufacturing impacted who used or received the wares.

The burnished finish on the bichromatic bowl indicates that it was made for an elite figure's burial. The bowl's bichromatic design reveals a high level of craftsmanship, requiring two stages of drying as opposed to one stage for a monochromatic vessel.²³ This process reveals the added labor necessary to create the alternating red and cream pattern, suggesting that the Tonalteca held this community member in high esteem. The bowl likely came from a larger assemblage, but the exact number in the tomb is uncertain. In addition to quality, the quantity of burnished ceramics indicated a greater work force in their production and symbolized higher status as well. It revealed the level of care afforded the deceased person and determined how well-equipped they were for the afterlife. The ancient Tonalá mortuary practices highlight how these wares were significant socio-economic symbols and valued as important collections for an elite individual's afterlife. Whether or not the ceramics served as trade goods is unknown, but their religious significance for the Tonalá community is undeniable.

The bowl's rounded form is also typical of Tonalá wares, indicating its connection to the earth. As Otto Schöndube argues, their forms stem from a larger Western Mexican tradition of emulating the natural curves of local flora and fauna.²⁴ The bowl's wide, shallow basin might recall a hollowed-out squash, a staple crop for Mesoamerican societies. Ceramic jugs may have mimicked larger gourds and ranged from short-necked, squat wares to wide mouthed globular vessels. The rounded bottoms of some vessels also speak to their placement on the earth. Tripod vessels are the exception with their three stocky legs supporting a basin above the ground. The potter's variation in form allowed for better protection, storage, or visibility of its contents, depending on the intended use. With generous clay stores in the area, the Native potters easily

²³ Schöndube, "Cerámica Bruñida," 27.

²⁴ Schöndube, "Cerámica Bruñida," 23.

adapted the raw material into wares of different size, form, color, and finish. In the colonial era, Indigenous craftspeople relied on these adaptation skills to appeal to a Spanish audience, effectively erasing the religious nature of the burnished ceramics and highlighting instead their connection with the Tonalá environment.

While the prominence of ceramics may have declined after the Classic period, Tonallan (as Tonalá was originally called) developed into a powerful regional empire in the Late Post-Classic Period. The name Tonallan means “place where the sun rises” in the Nahuatl language, probably given as a result of Nahua migration over the centuries.²⁵ Mapped by archaeologist Phil Weigand, the kingdom stretched from the metroplex of present-day Guadalajara down to Tlajomulco and Lake Chapala (figure 10).²⁶ The towns within the kingdom paid tribute to Tonallan, the leading city-state.²⁷ The main ethnic groups within the city-state, Tecuexe and Coca, have been referred to as “habitantes donde abundan las ollas (inhabitants where pots abound)”, suggesting their ties to ceramic production.²⁸ As their name suggests, Tonallan’s religion centered around the sun, as evidenced by archaeological remains of sun dials and temples devoted to the sun; these are now covered by the Guadalajara suburbs.²⁹ They practiced shaft tomb interments, continuing the mortuary practices set by their ancient forbearers in the Atemajac Valley in the Classic period. A lack of material culture from the Late Post-Classic severely limits our understanding of ceramics from this point in time, but their production must have remained in effect based on the strength of this industry in later centuries.

The Tonalteca suffered severe disruptions and population losses in the decades after the

²⁵ Ma. Teresa Figueroa, *Tonalá: Tradición Viva* (Ayuntamiento de Tonalá, 2015), 18.

²⁶ Eduardo Williams and Phil Weigand, eds., *Las Cuencas del Occidente de México: Época Prehispánica* (El Colegio de Michoacán, 1996), 235.

²⁷ López Cervantes, “El montículo de Coyula,” 16.

²⁸ Peter Gerhard, *The North Frontier of New Spain* (Princeton University, 1982), 154; Schöndube, “Cerámica Bruñida,” 30.

²⁹ Figueroa, *Tonalá*, 18.

Spanish arrival. While the Spaniards arrived in central Mexico in 1519, they did not venture into Western Mexico until 1530. At this time, Tonallan was ruled by a woman named Tzapotzintli who was said to have received the Spaniards peacefully.³⁰ This was a rare occurrence in the region where Indigenous groups were more likely to fight the Spanish invaders.³¹ Some of Tonallan's subjects chose this route, but they were ultimately defeated by the notorious Nuño de Guzman and his Indigenous allies. The conquest of Tonallan was part of a larger campaign against the Western territories of Mexico to seize natural resources and convert the Natives to Christianity.³² In an attempt to preserve her authority, the queen and her young son chose to get baptized, taking on Spanish names that aligned with their city's new Hispanicized name, Tonalá.³³ While a new colonial system overtook Tonalá, their population would face greater challenges in the form of forced labor and disease.

Tonalá's subjects endured repeated exploitation in the initial stages of Spanish colonialism, likely stalling ceramic production. They were placed within the *encomienda* system under Nuño de Guzmán to whom the Tonalteca provided food, cloth, poultry, and firewood.³⁴ Historical records do not mention ceramics as part of their tribute items, suggesting that the Spanish colonizers were not aware of the area's clay yet in the mid-sixteenth century. Tonalá's other resources must have been important though as Guzmán demanded more tribute and forced labor from Tonalá than any other town under his domain in Nueva Galicia.³⁵ After his arrest in

³⁰ Figueroa, *Tonalá*, 23. This ruler goes by different names, but I am choosing to use Tzapotzintli in accordance with the area's linguistic tradition. She is also called Tzapotzinco, but more commonly referred to as "Cihuapilli" in historical texts and contemporary settings. The term 'cihuapilli' means "noble woman," usually aligned with rulership or queen status.

³¹ Ida Altman, *The War for Mexico's West: Indians and Spaniards in New Galicia, 1524-1550* (University of New Mexico Press, 2010), 37.

³² Altman, *The War for Mexico's West*, 38.

³³ Figueroa, *Tonalá*, 24. The full name of the town was 'Santiago de Tonalá' in honor of the miraculous appearance of St. James at the Battle of Tonalá to champion the Spaniard's victory.

³⁴ Altman, *The War for Mexico's West*, 73.

³⁵ Altman, *The War for Mexico's West*, 73. Known to be a greedy and cruel man, Guzmán unleashed violence and terror on innumerable Indigenous communities in his campaign to conquer West Mexico. One of the most violent acts occurred right before reaching Tonallan. In what is present-day Michoacán, Guzmán ordered the ruthless torture

1536 and eventual exile, Tonalá was placed under the Spanish Crown's jurisdiction in 1544.³⁶ The Tonalteca were also placed under ecclesiastical jurisdiction in order to facilitate conversion efforts. The town was first placed under Franciscan control and then the Augustinian order took over Tonalá in 1572.³⁷ As these colonial initiatives increased, Tonalá's Indigenous presence rapidly decreased.

During the sixteenth century, Tonalá's population suffered a massive decline, putting the generational knowledge of ceramic production in danger of extinction. As Peter Gerhard explains, in 1577, a typhus epidemic reduced the area's Indigenous population by more than half. Civil jurisdiction records show that at the time of the plague, the population dropped from 2,735 in 1570 to 890 in 1580 because they lacked immunity to the Spanish illness.³⁸ It is unclear how many Tonalteca were active potters, but the epidemic likely had a drastic effect on their artisan base. The population continued to decline in the seventeenth century and did not increase again until mid-century when the population rose from 340 in 1644 to 385 in 1660, a mere fraction of their original numbers one hundred years prior.

Based on numbers alone, it is a remarkable feat that the Tonalteca and their city managed to survive into the seventeenth century. Although extensive labor exploitation and deadly epidemics brought by the Spanish colonizers caused their communities to dwindle, it did not extinguish the Indigenous ceramic tradition. Indeed, this tradition may have helped to hold Tonalá together. It is a testament to their perseverance that they successfully passed on their knowledge to future generations who could create and market burnished ceramics to help their community survive under colonial rule.

and murder of the last ruler, or *cazonci*, of the powerful Purepechà nation, believing he had hidden stores of gold. Not finding any gold, Guzmán left the empire devastated, subjugating Purepechà warriors to form part of his military campaign.

³⁶ Altman, *The War for Mexico's West*, 263; Gerhard, *North Frontier*, 154.

³⁷ Gerhard, *North Frontier*, 155.

³⁸ Gerhard, *North Frontier*, 49, 156.

After the intensity of colonial upheaval, the Indigenous peoples of Tonalá began reviving their pre-hispanic ceramics industry as an outlet for artistic agency. Thomas Charlton and Roberta Katz suggest that religious orders oversaw this pottery production.³⁹ Along with introducing an Iberian form, the Spaniards imposed new technology such as the potter's wheel and enclosed kilns.⁴⁰ In a move to infiltrate Spanish export markets, Tonalteca artisans combined the Iberian form with their unique clay and Indigenous workmanship, forging an advanced transcultural product. These new monochromatic, red-slipped burnished vessels must have appealed to Spanish consumers, whose affinity for the vessels generated economic demand that must have brought Indigenous artisans satisfaction. By adapting their religious wares into utilitarian items, the Tonalteca created desirable redware that set them on the path to preserving their cultural heritage after a century of Spanish rule.

There are many surviving pieces of early Tonalá burnished ware in the collection of the Museo de América that indicates their mass production during the seventeenth century. For example, the cup in figure 4 was likely made in the early to mid-seventeenth century and has a flat base, a rounded globular body, and a solid, curved handle coming off a stout neck. The water pitcher in figure 11 reflects the transition to making slightly larger vessels and with a style that favored a dimpled form and a tall tubular pourer. A larger jug in figure 12 provides a final evolution of the form where a narrow base leads up to a rotund, dimpled body with a double set of twisted clay handles evoking a more decorative quality. Their shiny burnished finish over a red clay slip reveals the Tonalteca's skill in adapting their work to be more appealing to Spaniards. The variety of ceramic cups, pitchers, and jugs illustrate how the Tonalá community

³⁹ Thomas H. Charlton and Roberta Rieff Katz, "Tonalá Bruñida Ware: Past and Present," *Archaeology* 32, no. 1 (1979): 45.

⁴⁰ Robin Farwell Gavin, "Introduction," in *Cerámica y Cultura: The Story of Spanish and Mexican Mayólica*, eds. Robin Farwell Gavin, Donna Pierce, and Alfonso Pleguezuelo (University of New Mexico Press, 2003), 7.

made Iberian forms fully their own through a series of material and cultural adaptations.

A comparison of the seventeenth century redware cup in figure 4 with the pre-hispanic bowl in figure 3 reveals how the Tonalteca used their clay to its highest potential by turning it into water vessels, directly appealing to Spanish taste. The artisans had access to a variety of clays in the area including red, yellow, and cream bases.⁴¹ According to Thomas Charlton, contemporary Tonalteca potters name this white or cream clay as “the source of an aromatic fragrance, much like that of earth after a rainstorm.”⁴² While the bowl’s properties may have been activated with a ritual beverage, its placement in a shaft tomb relegated the ware to a single use and stationary existence. By contrast, the burnished cups were meant to be actively used and handled. As a drinking cup, the raw material could expound its wondrous aroma more frequently, thus speaking to the Tonalteca awareness of Spanish interest for their clay.

The redware cup’s form highlights a different function than the pre-hispanic bowl, revealing the change from a religious to a secular function. In creating a drinking cup, the potters adapted their fully rounded vessels into a hand-held globular shape with a flat base appropriate for tabletops rather than the rounded bottoms intended for placement on the earth. With the majority of ceramics stemming from shaft tombs in Tonalá, there is little evidence of utilitarian wares that may not have been considered worthy to include in burials. Nonetheless, it is likely that the Iberian cup form was new for the Tonalteca, especially with the flat base design. The handle aided a consumer in picking up the cup and bringing the delectable water directly to their mouth. While the pre-burial use of the pre-hispanic bowl is unknown, its final function as an offering vessel suggests that it was valued more for its spiritual resonance. Thus, the burnished cup met a domestic need, moving away from any religious origins.

⁴¹ Gutierre Aceves and Rubén Páez, “Tonalá Bruñida: Reseña de una Técnica que Perdura,” in *Tonalá: Sol de Barro*, ed. Alberto Ruy-Sánchez Lacy (Banca Cremi, 1991), 40.

⁴² Charlton and Rieff Katz, “Tonalá Bruñida Ware,” 48.

The cup's burnished finish increased its functionality in much the same way as the bowl, but it shifted its ancient cultural value. Before the Spanish arrival, a burnished finish on funerary vessels and figurines indicated a religious connection and high social status. Burnishing a utilitarian drinking cup was thus a deviation from traditional practices. Owning these cups and other redware became a marker of wealth in Spain, straying far from the polishing technique's original orientation. This finishing method was a natural choice in serving to give the ceramic an impermeable surface, making it more functional as a drinking vessel. By contrast, the bowl's hardened surface protected its contents for use by the deceased person's spirit as they journeyed to the afterlife. The production of these redware cups cemented the Indigenous burnishing technique into the early colonial fabric, moving farther away from religious connotations.

The cup's lack of geometric design via bichromatic red and cream slips further indicates its conversion from a religious ware into a secular vessel. The cup's decorative element manifests in shallow, circular stamps imprinted across the surface. In contrast, the pre-hispanic bowl reveals the preference for painted slip decoration in an ordered structure on both the interior and exterior of the vessel. While the red slip of the cup echoed its use in traditional Tonalá wares, the purposeful monochromatic choice made a statement about the significance of the function. The color resembles the earth, as if the clay came from the ground fully formed as a vessel. When a buyer saw the red color, they might immediately have thought of the clay's fragrant properties, making them wish to buy it. In this way, the aesthetic links the olfactory senses with its facture. In contrast, the ancient bichromatic design pointed to religious duality, linking the aesthetic with spiritual symbolism. The decision to remove the white slip thus highlights the Tonalteca interest in marketing their wares to highlight their material's earthly origins.

The red burnished ware pitcher in figure 11 illustrates an alternate adapted form that enhanced functionality through the modelling of the ceramic's body. Despite a tall, narrow neck, its form more closely resembles older Tonalá ceramics compared to the cup. The pitcher form was easier to adapt since they were used to making fuller, rounded, vases, albeit with wide-mouth openings and rounded bottoms. With almost hexagonal dimples covering the globular body of the vessel, the ware resembles a slightly deflated soccer ball. The dimpled effect is an innovation, as compared to the smooth, even surfaces of pre-hispanic wares. This clever dimpling design increased the ware's surface area which created more room for condensation to occur. These pockets may have made it easier to grasp the ware, especially when it was wet. The pitcher form signals the creative spirit of the Tonalteca who sought to increase functionality through the ware's shape.

A burnished redware jug acts as evidence for the variety of styles employed in meeting Spanish consumer's needs (see figure 12). Its larger size aligns with the pitcher's scale as compared to the small cup. The larger the ceramic, the more clay it required, the more surface potential it created for aromatic activation, and the higher the price. By contrast, the majority of Tonalá ancient wares were smaller in nature or shallow. Tonalteca potters also adapted the handled cup model onto the stockier jugs, making them easier to carry or move. The inclusion of a second set of handles on this jug reveals a deeper level of creativity that ensured the ware met full functionality and convenience demands while also being decorative and aesthetically pleasing. Moreover, they improved the ease of pouring water by making an undulating lip as opposed to a circular rim at the neck's opening. Production of these varied redwares kept the Tonalteca afloat through the early seventeenth century, creating a strong ceramics industry in the wake of Spanish colonization.

It is evident in reviewing these objects and the broader collections of surviving red burnished ware today that the variation in design speaks to the Tonalteca's artistic agency, creativity, and style. The production of these wares renewed a connection with their ancient ceramic traditions, maintaining slip application, burnished finishes, and control over their raw material into the early colonial period. The ceramics reveal a transcultural evolution that speaks to their ingenuity in improving functionality and keeping their consumers engaged with their products. Combined with their fragrant clay, these wares became a popular commodity in the global market. Finding consistent buyers in Spain, the Tonalteca succeeded in adapting their ceramics tradition to maintain a steady production flow that satisfied an Iberian market for earthenware vessels.

II. Tonalá Red Burnished Ware's Infiltration into Spanish Life

Before its infiltration by Tonalá redware, Spain maintained an active ceramics scene that melded an array of transcultural influences. Centuries of Muslim rule introduced advanced glazing technology, making it a hub for decorative tile production. Italian influence contributed to the rise of lusterware, a high-fired glazed ceramic that came to define Spanish ceramic artistry.⁴³ With such a vibrant ceramics market, Spanish consumers were likely aware of quality, durability, and novelty when shopping for these goods. Earthenware vessels coming out of Estremoz, Portugal called *púcaros* especially enticed Spaniards, opening the door for Tonalá red burnished ware to fill their place in later decades.⁴⁴

In the late sixteenth century, a new ceramic form emerged in Portugal and became popular in Spain. Although the Portuguese were responsible for making *púcaros*, the Iberian form originally dates back to the Roman empire. In the first century, the Iberian peninsula came under Roman rule and received the Latin name, 'Hispania.'⁴⁵ The Romans established pottery centers across Hispania to produce *terra sigillata*, a polished ceramic that originated in Italy, the seat of the empire.⁴⁶ This type of pottery has been termed "red-slipped earthenware" due to the red clay and water slip applied before firing.⁴⁷ It was mass produced using molds to create cups, bowls, and platters for utilitarian use throughout the Roman empire.⁴⁸ The Portuguese revived this style through the production of *púcaros*, laying the groundwork for Spanish interest in low-fired, unglazed earthenware.

⁴³ Gavin, "Introduction," 3, 5.

⁴⁴ Jan Baart, "Terra Sigillata from Estremoz, Portugal," in *Everyday and Exotic Pottery from Europe c. 650-1900: Studies in honour of John Hurst*, eds. D. Gaimster and M. Redknapp (Oxford University Press, 1992), 273.

⁴⁵ The Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History: Iberian Peninsula, 1–500 A.D.," last updated October 2000, <https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ht/05/eusi.html>.

⁴⁶ J.M. Compañá, A. Cabeza, M.A.G. Aranda, and L. León-Reina, "The Baetican workshops: a starting point to study Terra Sigillata Hispanica," *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 45 (2014): 26.

⁴⁷ "Roman Domestic Art: Terra Sigillata," Harvard Art Museums, accessed July 23, 2024, <https://harvardartmuseums.org/tour/397/slide/7290>.

⁴⁸ "Roman Domestic Art: Terra Sigillata," Harvard Art Museums.

A comparison of the Portuguese *púcaro* from figure 5 and the seventeenth century redware cup in figure 4 reveals the common elements in their manufacture that Spanish consumers found desirable. The *púcaro* example from the Museu Nacional de Arqueologia in Lisbon has a flat, circular base with a full body and two small handles. Likewise, the redware cup demonstrates a flat base, though its globular shape and single handle perhaps indicate a more sophisticated style. The undulating design on the *púcaro* creates a wavy rim that may have been difficult to drink out of as opposed to the smooth rim of the Tonalá redware. Both forms speak to their function as drinking cups, satisfying Spanish leisure needs.

The *púcaro*'s absence of glaze added an earthy note to its contents, much like the red burnished ware from Tonalá. The refreshing water taste made *púcaros* popular objects of exchange in early modern Iberia. One account reveals their appeal to the upper classes, with King Philip II of Spain purchasing Portuguese *púcaros* for his daughters in 1581.⁴⁹ Other Spanish elites soon followed this fashion, importing pieces from Portugal and enjoying the *púcaro*'s pleasant qualities.⁵⁰ These Portuguese wares established a trend for flavoring water with unglazed ceramics. The red burnished ware from Tonalá must have built on this trend, as their clay imparted a new and distinctive taste to water, one that could only be found in the clay from Western Mexico.

The *púcaro*'s unglazed finish allowed aromatic properties to exude from the vessel when it got wet, an aspect shared by the red burnished ware. In Spain, Tonalá redwares were often called *búcaros*, revealing that they were seen as quite similar to the Portuguese *púcaro*. Early modern accounts describe the use of Tonalá redware as fragrant humidifiers for interior rooms, most likely in a jug form as seen in figure 12. An Italian traveler named Lorenzo Magalotti

⁴⁹ Baart, "Terra Sigillata," 273.

⁵⁰ Baart, "Terra Sigillata," 274.

recounted the experience in 1695, stating,

...the smell of the bucheri is the most ancient of all other smells...from the effusion of the first humour the resolution of that precious mastery to give forth immediately in herbs, in flowers, in apples, in gums, in balms, in aromas. Let us now consider this same earth, all bathed by those first sweats of the air, and subsequently bathed by those virginal waters of the springs and rivers: and let experience tell us what the air of a room becomes through a black bucherero soaked in water...What fragrance, what glory, what paradise on earth and in the air.⁵¹

From this description, it is clear how the water activated the clay to create a pleasurable setting for its user. The high praise given the Tonalá blackware points to its popularity over the Portuguese *púcaros*, indicating its position in carrying on the redware's infiltration.

While these ceramics from Portugal and Tonalá had similarities, the red burnished ware had distinct differences from those made in Estremoz that made them more novel and desirable to Spanish consumers. Due to the nature of the clay, the burnished surface of redware from Tonalá appears as if it is glazed, which may have enhanced its popularity in Europe. As a result of volcanic activity in the Atemajac Valley, the clay in Tonalá consists primarily of fine-grained volcanic rock.⁵² Recurring basaltic lava flows left the rock exposed to the elements and thus more susceptible to weathering.⁵³ Through chemical weathering, basalt minerals such as feldspar transformed into soft clay, resulting in plastic clay deposits well-suited for burnishing.⁵⁴ It is likely that the land also supplied excellent options for ceramic polishing tools. For example, the high sheen visible in the burnished cup in figure 4 illustrates the combination of fine-grained clay and a fine-grained polishing stone. A burnished finish is thus an indication of the higher quality material available in Tonalá, creating a brilliant ware that functioned in a way that no glazed ware could. As such, the cup's shiny finish was indicative of its novel place, rendering it

⁵¹ Andrea Sciffo, "The Selected Letters of Mr. Magalotti: L'odori dei bucheri," *Il Covile*, 929, (2016): 1-2.

⁵² Cetenal Carta Geológica, *Guadalajara Este F-13-D-66*, 1:50,000, in *En cumplimiento con el reglamento de la ley general de equilibrio ecológico y la protección al medio ambiente en materia de impacto ambiental*, by Gobierno de Jalisco (Comisión Estatal de Ecología, 1990), 66.

⁵³ James A. Woodhead, *Geology*, (Salem Press, 1999), 31, 32.

⁵⁴ Woodhead, *Geology*, 704.

both functional and aesthetically pleasing to a Spaniard accustomed to glossy, glazed ceramics from Europe.

By contrast, the lack of volcanoes in Portugal produced inferior quality clay for pottery compared to the type found in Tonalá. In the area around Estremoz, Portugal, the clay came from granite, a different type of igneous rock.⁵⁵ This coarse-grained rock formed from magma deep below the earth's crust. Taking thousands of years to reach the surface, the granite's feldspar minerals chemically weathered into clay while its quartz crystals resisted the process.⁵⁶ As a result, the hard rock turned into a non-plastic clay that was rough and hard to shape, and by nature, harder to polish. Furthermore, it is likely that the available stones for polishing the wares were also hard-grained, resulting in rougher finishes. Though polished, the *púcaro*'s finish in figure 5 appears matte and with a duller texture compared to the glossy luster on the burnished ware from Tonalá. While it is possible that Portuguese potters imported fine-grained stones to use for polishing, it did not change the restrictions imparted by their low-grade raw material. Thus, the clay in Tonalá proved to be chemically superior for making ceramic drinking vessels, increasing their value in the eyes of Spanish buyers.

Due to the quality of Tonalá's clay, broken bits of redware became popular to consume, merging with a larger medical practice and social belief that clay improved health and beauty. In the early modern period, European medical practices followed the theory of humours, an ancient doctrine structured around the four elements—fire, air, water, and earth—and their relationship to the human body.⁵⁷ Depending on an individual's constitution, ingesting specific foods or liquids or even clay, could be one approach to balance the hot, cold, wet, and dry qualities imparted by

⁵⁵ H. G. M. Eggenkamp and J. M. Marques, *Geological Map of Portugal*, in "Distribution and variation of geochemical signatures in mineral waters from the Portuguese mainland," *XXXVIII IAH Congress* (2010): 1797.

⁵⁶ Woodhead, *Geology*, 291, 704.

⁵⁷ Rashid Bhikha and Dr. John Glynn, "The Theory of Humours Revisited," *International Journal of Development Research* 7, no. 9 (2017), 15030.

the elements.⁵⁸ In Spain, it was believed that one could enhance one's complexion through the ingestion of clay, a high status social marker imperative for a young lady of the court.⁵⁹ Historian Matias de la Mota Padilla highlights women's affinity for the clay, stating,

Tonalá has mines of a clay so special that in all the world there is nothing similar, and for this reason there is so much esteem for their vases, jars, water jugs, urns, tankards, and various kinds of animal figures, large and small, so polished and perfect that in many parts of Europe women carry them as amulets, so soft are they as to aroma and taste that often women eat such clay; for this reason the ware is sold by *arrobas*... in Jalapa, Veracruz, and Acapulco even when it is broken; it is more esteemed than crystal, than china, and more than vases of Alcorza; that is, the very delicate things are.⁶⁰

This description reveals how some Spanish consumers viewed Tonalá clay as a necessity to have on their person, potentially associated with a preoccupation about one's appearance. While the consumption of ceramic fragments may have been done for different reasons, it could also be seen as a symbolic consumption of the Indigenous land that the Spanish Crown claimed as its own, contributing to the desirability of Tonalá wares over Portugal's.

The color of the Tonalá redware may have increased its popularity through the belief that the red slip was reminiscent of the land from which the clay was harvested. It is clear from inventory records that early modern collectors included the burnished ware from Tonalá in their possession. For example, a Spanish noblewoman, Doña Catalina Vélez de Guevara, had over 300 Tonalá ceramics in her possession at the time of her death in 1684.⁶¹ She was the wife of an ambassador named Don Iñigo Velez de Guevara, Count of Oñate and Viceroy in Naples.⁶² An inventory of her possessions lists her collection of Tonalá ceramics as "barros de guadalaxara de

⁵⁸ Noga Arikha, *Passions and Tempers: A History of the Humours* (Ecco, 2007), 92. This phenomenon of eating clay is called "geophagy" and it is a practice that has been performed worldwide at different points in history and across a variety of cultures.

⁵⁹ Berthold Laufer, "Geophagy," *Publications of the Field Museum of Natural History, Anthropological Series* 18, no. 2 (1930), 104.

⁶⁰ Charlton and Rieff Katz, "Tonalá Bruñida Ware," 52.

⁶¹ María Concepción García Sáiz and José Luis Barrio Mayo, "Presencia de cerámica mexicana en España," *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones* (1987): 105, 109.

⁶² García Sáiz and Barrio Mayo, "Mexican Ceramics," 191.

la Yndias,” or “clay from Guadalajara de las Indias.”⁶³ In referencing the Spanish founded city and capital of Nueva Galicia, the Guadalajara name overshadows the credit owed to Tonalá in producing these wares. Furthermore, the “Indias” distinction reveals the colonial propensity to mislabel the viceroalties by their relation to Asia, creating an exotic construct around Indigenous products from the Americas. This process highlights how Spaniards viewed themselves as the dominant power, treating outside territories like Nueva Galicia as “the other.” By contrast, the *púcaro*’s terracotta color evoked soil from the Iberian peninsula, eliminating any possibility of viewing it as ‘foreign’ land. Therefore, red burnished ware from Tonalá expressed distinct qualities, both materially and culturally, that made elite Spaniards desire them more than a *púcaro* from Portugal.

Through infiltrating Spanish daily life, collections of red burnished ceramics from Tonalá came to symbolize socio-economic status for wealthy Spaniards. This position is reminiscent of burnished ceramic offerings that honored deceased elites in Tonalá shaft tombs. While the Tonalteca engaged in communal gifting of wares and the Spaniards performed personal acquisitions, the significance of the red burnished wares as a social symbol remains unchanged. For the Tonalteca potters, the redware’s infiltration into private collections proved that their ceramic adaptations had succeeded in appealing to Spanish taste, thus preserving their artistic tradition. That these clay vessels became a product of empire can most clearly be evidenced via their inclusion in Baroque Spanish still life paintings.

In the first half of the seventeenth century, still life painting in Spain grew into a popular genre that reflected the global products acquired by Spanish society as a result of Spain’s imperial expansion. Tonalá redware pieces formed part of this assortment of luxury imports, especially as they gained notoriety and social prestige for their olfactory qualities and

⁶³ García Sáiz and Barrio Mayo, “Presencia de cerámica mexicana,” 105.

complexion benefits. Spanish artists often included them in their works, painting them alongside other imported items to be viewed as products of empire. In the end, the appearance of Tonalá red burnished ware in Spanish still life paintings speaks to the creative success of their Indigenous makers, who molded wares that Spaniards actively desired, acquired, and exhibited over the course of the seventeenth century and beyond.

The incorporation of red burnished ware into *bodegones* expanded the Spanish still life genre, creating new opportunities for art marketing. Appearing towards the end of the sixteenth century, early *bodegones* typically depicted fruit, vegetables, and simple wares, as influenced by similar themes executed by the Dutch and Italian masters.⁶⁴ Rather than relying on commissions, this genre gave agency to the artist to choose the subject matter.⁶⁵ In Spain, the acquisition of colonial territories in acts of imperialist expansion led to a wider variety of the contents in the still life, as artists sought to show their skill in rendering foreign materials. The inclusion of foreign materials was also likely intended to appeal to Spanish nobles who might have similar objects in their own collections. As red burnished ware entered the market in Iberia, Spanish artists readily added them to their compositions to garner acclaim.

The proliferation of redware depictions is evident across *bodegones* by a number of different artists, such as the one by Pereda discussed earlier. The exhibition, *Spanish Still Life in the Golden Age 1600-1650*, included at least fifteen works with Tonalá ceramics, ranging from cups to pitchers and jugs. A work from 1640 serves as an excellent example of the redware's representation in Spanish painting. Painted by Juan de Zurbarán (1620-1649), *Still Life with Chocolate* exhibits a collection of New Spanish commodities (figure 13). On the left side of the composition, a copper chocolate pot shines brightly against a dark background. Underneath the

⁶⁴ William B. Jordan, *Spanish Still Life in the Golden Age 1600-1650* (Kimbell Art Museum, 1985) exhibition catalogue, 4, 7.

⁶⁵ Jordan, *Spanish Still Life*, 7.

pot's long handle, a wooden chocolate mill rests on the tabletop beside it. Moving to the pot's right, two Chinese export cups sit overturned on the table, one stacked precariously atop the other. By their side lies a light pink flower blossom, perhaps hibiscus from Asia. In the center, a raised silver tray holds a round cup filled with chocolate while its white exterior is reflected in the polished silver. Beneath the tray on its right side, a short block of an unidentified substance recedes into shadow; a few broken fragments of the block rest at the table's edge. At the tray's right, a shapely burnished redware cup from Tonalá stands in the corner, completing the composition.

In *Still Life with Chocolate*, the burnished ware, along with its imported counterparts, speak to Spanish acquisition and consumption of Indigenous products. Operating out of Seville, Juan de Zurbarán had ample access to the goods coming in from New Spain. His father, Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664), was a successful still life painter and taught his son the trade from a young age.⁶⁶ This work reflects Juan's skill as he represents an assortment of imported products in a dramatic composition, pointing to their use in leisure activity. The ingestion of the chocolate drink and smoking of tobacco, two Indigenous agricultural products, became popular forms of relaxation for Spaniards in the seventeenth century.⁶⁷ From this perspective, the Spanish viewed the colonies as abundant lands from which to procure rich resources and Indigenous products that would improve their lives on the mainland. The extraction of copper was necessary to craft chocolate pots while the cultivation of cacao enabled the drink to be made in the first place.⁶⁸ Silver mining in New Spain and New Granada provided raw material for trays and other

⁶⁶ William B. Jordan and Peter Cherry, *Spanish Still Life from Velázquez to Goya*, exh. cat. (National Gallery, 1995), 104.

⁶⁷ Norton, *Sacred Gifts*, 167, 184.

⁶⁸ Kendall Brown, *A History of Mining in Latin America: From the Colonial Era to the Present* (University of New Mexico, 2012), 3; Norton, *Sacred Gifts*, 64.

silverware.⁶⁹ In Nueva Galicia, the harvesting of clay from Tonalá allowed the Indigenous artisans to mold burnished ceramics of varying shapes and sizes. In all cases, Spaniards coveted these natural products from the Americas for their enjoyable consumption, olfactory properties, or a mix of both.

The redware's inclusion in this still life composition highlights its position in the global market. The artist exemplifies this notion by rendering Chinese porcelain cups amidst the assemblage to denote the import's social status as a high-end, luxury item. Whereas Marcy Norton credits the "plebeian mariner network," specifically the Portuguese, for facilitating the trade of tobacco and bolstering its popularity through social settings in Spain, the ceramic cup's success can be attributed to the Tonalteca makers whose own hands directly shaped the wares, appealing to an individual consumer's leisure needs.⁷⁰

A contemporary of Juan de Zurbarán, Spanish artist Juan de Espinosa included red burnished ware in most of his *bodegones*, including *Still Life with Dead Bird* from 1651 (figure 14). Sitting on a light gray counter, a bright redware jug with two handles occupies the left third of the composition. Its form is reminiscent of the jug previously analyzed from the Museo de América (figure 12). Moving to the center, an oversized bunch of light green grapes fills the picture plane, its dark green leaf and long stem extending into the background. Slightly behind the stem, a large white-tan shell sits upright in the last third of the painting. In the foreground, a stem of long, slender grapes lays on the left side; a small dead bird lies prostrate on the right side, its white underbelly to the viewer while its red head cocks back almost out of frame.

This *bodegón* speaks to the sensorial experience of red burnished ware consumption. The ceramic's placement next to food alludes to the clay's physical ingestion. The prominent scale of

⁶⁹ Byron Ellsworth Hamann, "The Mirrors of Las Meninas: Cochineal, Silver, and Clay," *Art Bulletin* 92, no. 1–2 (2010), 21.

⁷⁰ Altman, *The War for Mexico's West*, 155, 158.

the grapes and the loose stem in front of the ceramic suggests the sweetness of the clay and its envelopment into the folds of European medical practice and culture. The redware's separation from the seashell furthers its pleasant taste compared to a salty flavor evoked by the shell. From another angle, the red accent feathers on the bird's face visually connect it with the jug. The bird acts as a symbol of death to suggest the fleeting experience of the burnished ware's minerals and olfactory properties. A seemingly random arrangement of objects, this work shows the evolving representation of Indigenous redware as cultural icons in Spain.

The Pereda work referenced earlier, *Still Life with a Clock*, represents two Tonalá redwares amongst a wide variety of imported goods, both natural and produced, solidifying the Indigenous-made vessels as foreign objects to include in a private collection (see figure 2). The sweeping red curtain in the right side of the composition draws back perfectly, revealing the Tonalá wares as if they were the stars in a theater production. The presence of a large clock in the midst of the scene warns of human mortality, alluding to the frivolity of luxury spending and lending a hollowness to the state of Spanish society at the time. Even so, the artist's inclusion of two different ceramic pitchers from Tonalá encourages consumerism by showcasing the variety of wares available. These are recreated with a painter's vision and skill at rendering the foreign material.

As in Zurbarán's work, Pereda elevates the red earthenware to the level of European luxury goods, albeit on the side of nature. Visually, the redware from Tonalá offers a direct connection to the Americas as their material manifestation represents the earth of Spain's newly conquered land. Their placement amongst the shells anchors the work as evidence of the land's consumption by a Spanish buyer through both material purchase and physical ingestion of the ceramic's clay. Thus, Pereda puts the world on display through his artistic interpretation of red

burnished ware and other goods, speaking to a Spaniard's socio-economic status imparted by these global collections.

The representation of Tonalá red burnished ware in Spanish *bodegones* serves as evidence for their double commodification in a multi-stage transculturation process. As a physical object, these redwares drew economic demand and became luxury items collected by Spaniards. Sensing the power behind private collections, Spanish artists used burnished ware and other luxury goods to expand the still life genre and immortalize these ceramics in artificial painterly depictions. In this way, the Tonalteca contributed to Spanish art and culture with the redware forming part of the 'fine art' European tradition through its subject matter. Through the commodification of their representation, the burnished ceramics achieved an even wider distribution and modes of consumption in Spain that surpassed their use in Tonalá. Unlike agricultural products such as chocolate and tobacco, the red burnished ceramics were created by Tonalteca hands. Their creation relies on profound ceramic knowledge and artistry whereas chocolate and tobacco are reproducible goods reliant on a farmer's planting. Spanish artist's appreciation for these works manifests in their frequent appearance in *bodegones*, showcasing these diverse ceramic styles with precise renderings in oil paint. No longer confined to underground tombs, the burnished ceramics of Tonalá shine bright in still life pictorial depictions, enabling Indigenous visibility of Tonalteca ceramic traditions in the early colonial period.

Conclusion

The story of red burnished ware from Tonalá, Jalisco, highlights the creativity and resilience of the Tonalteca artisans whose work reveals that the Spanish colonization of Mexico is not a one-way street, but in fact makes meaningful contributions in the other direction too. The position of material in this transcultural process is essential, as it reveals the potential for Indigenous agency in the Spanish colonial system. Moreover, this thesis underscores ceramic vessels as a fruitful avenue for research that can complement prior scholarship on ancient figurines. The revival of Tonalá's ancient ceramic practice is most notable because it established a strong ceramics industry that continued to grow and evolve over the centuries through the present day.

By the eighteenth century, Tonalteca artisans produced large, decorative *tibores* with greater frequency, applying paint over the burnished surface (figure 15). Colonial symbolism became very overt through colorful motifs depicting animal and vegetal themes, replacing the monochromatic red-slipped aesthetic popularized in the early colonial period. Designs became increasingly influenced by Asian export products passing through Mexico to reach the Atlantic Ocean and Spain on the other side. This cultural crossover heightened the transculturation of Tonalá ceramics, creating a distinctly Mexican style that persists to this day. The red-slipped burnished ware's legacy lives on through the Tonalteca artisans who continue the tradition of Indigenous ceramic production, relying on tourists and online shoppers alike to keep their cultural contributions alive and distribute their handmade wares worldwide.

To quote Tonalá historic archivist Federico Melchor Casillas, “Lo que venga después ya es creatividad, la materia prima es primero... Eso es lo que distingue Tonalá (What comes after is creativity, the raw material comes first...that is what distinguishes Tonalá).” His expression

perfectly sums up this thesis as he highlights the uniqueness of Tonalá's raw material and how its activation by Tonalteca skill and creativity create one-of-a-kind ceramics that hold a lifetime of Indigenous tradition and agency within their burnished walls.

FIGURES



Central Mexico with major colonial cities noted and the Valley of Mexico outlined.

Figure 1. Thomas Charlton, *Central Mexico with major colonial cities noted and the Valley of Mexico outlined*. From the article “Tonalá Bruñida Ware: Past and Present,” 49.



Figure 2. Antonio de Pereda, *Still Life with a Clock*, 1652. Oil on canvas. Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow, Russia.



Figure 3. Interior and exterior view of a bowl, 300-600, Tonalá, Jalisco, Mexico. Red-slipped earthenware. Museo Regional de Guadalajara, Guadalajara, Mexico. Photograph by author.



Figure 4. Cup, 17th century, Tonalá, Jalisco, Mexico. Red-slipped earthenware. 7.5 cm x diameter: 9 cm x mouth diameter: 5.5 cm. Museo de América, Madrid, Spain.





Figure 5. Shaft tomb model, Classic Period, 300-900 AD, Zapopan, Jalisco, Mexico. Museo Regional de Guadalajara, Guadalajara, Mexico. Photograph by author.



Figure 6. Púcaro, 17th century, Estremoz, Portugal. Ceramic. 7.5 x 12 x 6.5 cm. Museu Nacional de Arqueologia, Lisbon, Portugal.



Figure 7. Vessel, c. 1650-1700, Tonalá, Jalisco, Mexico. Black earthenware and paint. 12 cm x diameter: 12 cm. Museo de América, Madrid, Spain.



Figure 8. Standing Couple, 300-900 AD, Tala-Tonalá, Jalisco, Mexico. Ceramic. Mermoz Galerie, Paris, France.



Figure 9. Shaman figurine, 700-900 AD, Tonalá, Jalisco, Mexico. Ceramic. Photograph from INAH excavation of Coyula, Tonalá in February 1994. Municipal Historical Archive of Tonalá.



Fig. 24. La "doble frontera" transtarasca-transcaxcana en vísperas de la conquista española (1460-1521 d.C.).

Figure 10. Phil Weigand, *La "doble frontera" transtarasca-transcaxcana en vísperas de la conquista española (1460-1521)*. From the book, *Las Cuencas del Occidente de México: Época Prehispánica*, 235.



Figure 11. Pitcher, 17th century, Tonalá, Jalisco, Mexico. Red-slipped earthenware. 27 cm x diameter: 20 cm x mouth diameter: 7 cm. Museo de América, Madrid, Spain.



Figure 12. Jug, 17th century, Tonalá, Jalisco, Mexico. Red-slipped earthenware. 28 cm x diameter: 30 cm x mouth diameter: 13 cm. Museo de América, Madrid, Spain.



Figure 13. Juan de Zurbarán, *Still Life with Chocolate*, 1640. Oil on canvas. Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie, Besançon, France.



Figure 14. Juan de Espinosa, *Still Life with Dead Bird*, 1651. Oil on panel. Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain.



Figure 15. Vessel (Tibor), 18th century, Tonalá, Jalisco, Mexico. Red-slipped earthenware. Museo de América, Madrid, Spain.

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ABSTRACT

Fragrant Ceramics: Indigenous Industry in Early Colonial Tonalá

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Tonalá, Mexico's ancient pottery tradition and religious culture foreground the introduction of *púcaros*, a polished ceramic drinking vessel popular in Spain. In the Classic period, bichromatic burnished ceramics were traditionally used in a funerary context to honor the Tonalteca elite. The production of red-slipped burnished wares during the colonial period reveals the Tonalteca's desire to reestablish their Indigenous ceramic traditions and mobilize their awareness of Spanish consumer's taste. Although Spanish colonization prompted epidemics and Christian conversion, the Indigenous artisans overcame these challenges, building a ceramics industry that preserved their pottery techniques. An examination of the Indigenous adaptation and Spanish infiltration of these burnished ceramics demonstrates the transculturation of Indigenous wares from bichromatic religious vessels into monochromatic secular redware, indicating cultural resistance under Spanish colonial rule.

The infiltration of Tonalá redware in elite Spanish society manifests in Baroque Spanish still lifes, media that artistically represent these Indigenous-made ceramics as collectible curiosities. Traditional art historical studies read these vessels as emblems of empire, but I claim that red burnished ware in Spanish still lifes reveal Indigenous agency, positioning these Tonalteca artisans as contributors to European culture. Using materiality and material culture methods, I argue that burnished ceramics, both as religious offerings in the tombs of the deceased in Tonalá and as utilitarian redware in the homes of peninsular Spaniards are symbols of socio-economic status and power. When depicted in still life paintings, these now secularized objects undergo further commodification as fictionalized representations, underscoring the transculturation of Indigenous Tonalteca products into desirable status symbols for the Spanish elite.