

# The Rise and Fall of Urartu: A Textual Geography of the *Corpus dei Testi Urartei* (CTU)

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## Problem

Tracing the rise, expansion, and ultimate demise of Urartu (900-700 BCE) is a critical historical question without easy answers. Previous scholarship sought to represent Urartian borders by drawing static polygons around sites where certain Urartian materials such as characteristic pottery (red-polished ware) or bronze objects were discovered.

However, these techniques pose various shortcomings:

- Pottery is a gross chronological marker which flattens key historical developments, and red-polished ware is rare, even at excavated sites.
- Urartian bronze objects were desirable, imitable and highly portable.
- The use of artifacts to determine political sovereignty prompts legitimate debates about the material correlation of sovereignty, affects of hybridity etc. (Cifarelli et al. 2019)
- Models assume territorial states.

## Motivations

- To explore alternative models of states as “network empires” (Liverani 1988, Smith 2005, Ristvet 2018).
- To examine Urartian chronologies on a finer timescale (Earley-Spadoni 2015).
- To evaluate the representative value of concepts such as “border” and “territory”
- To produce temporally and spatially sensitive maps of Urartian development.

## Methods

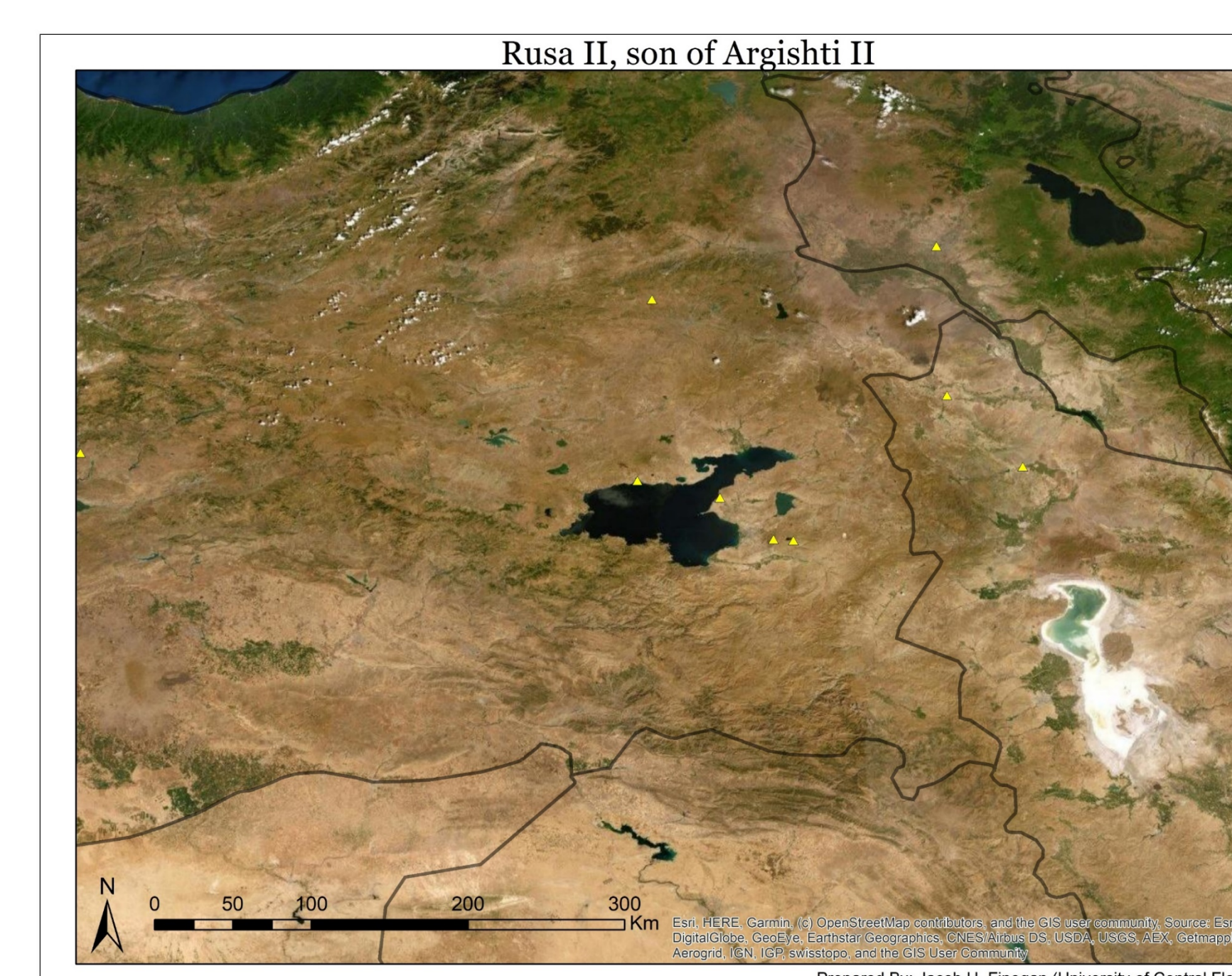
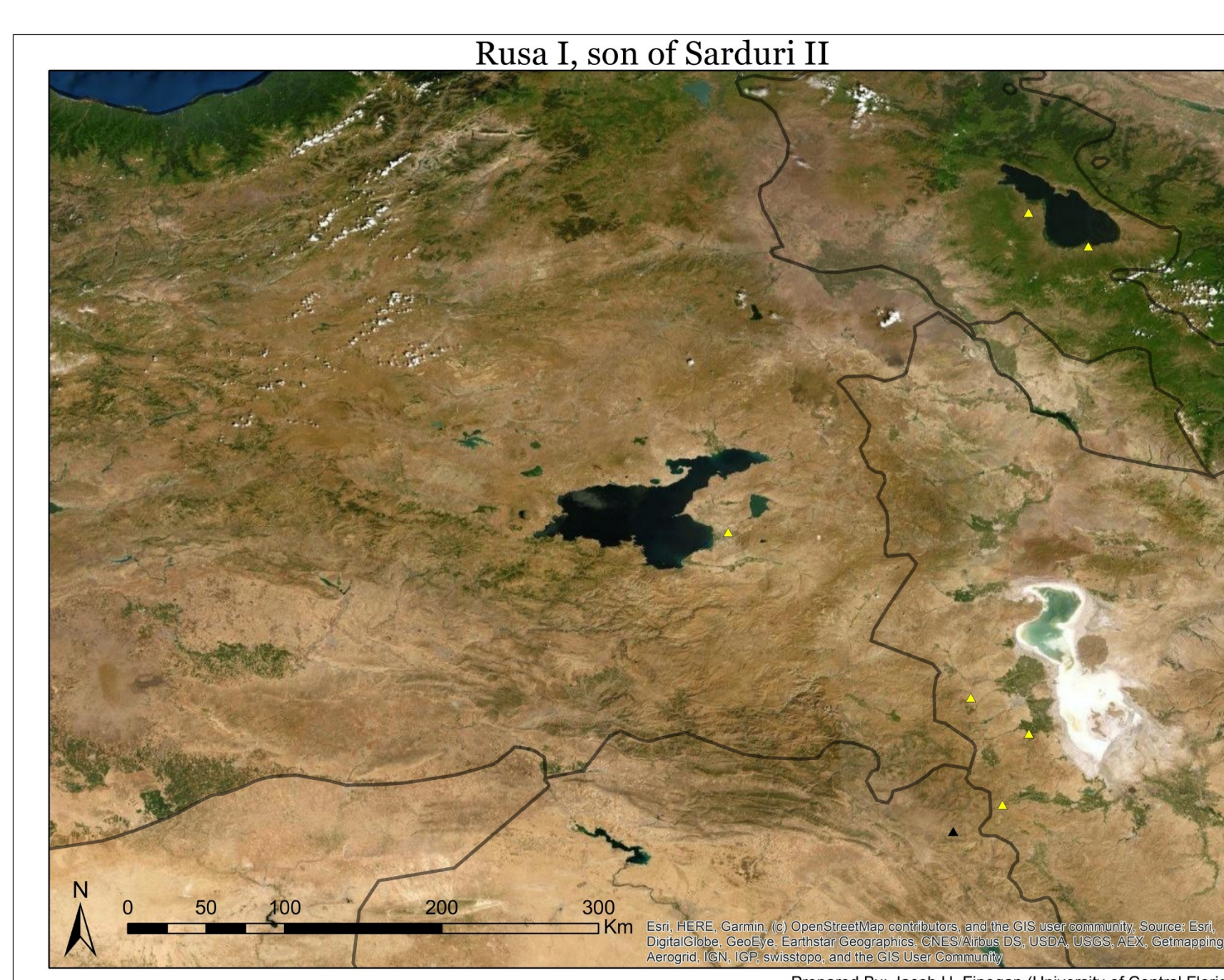
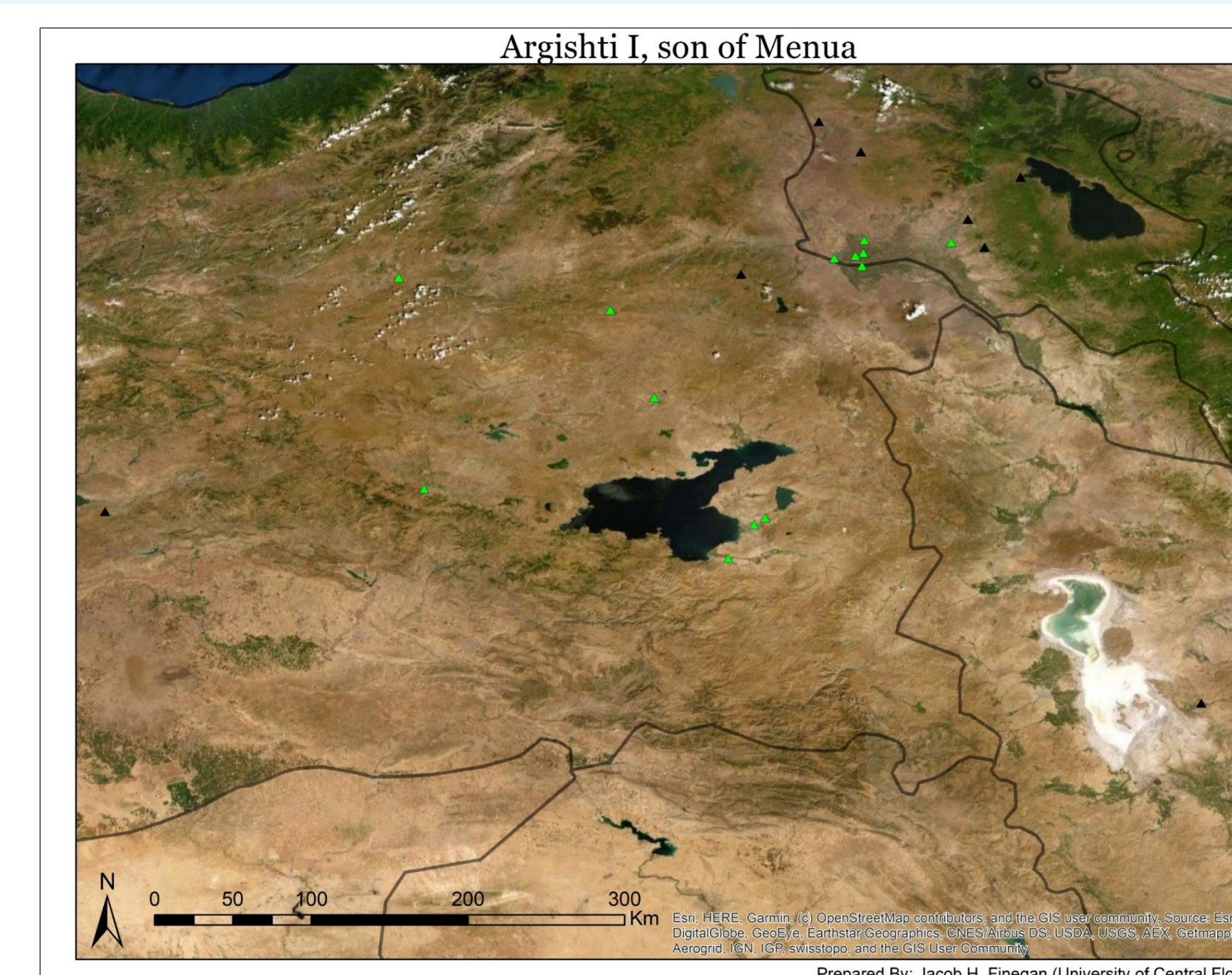
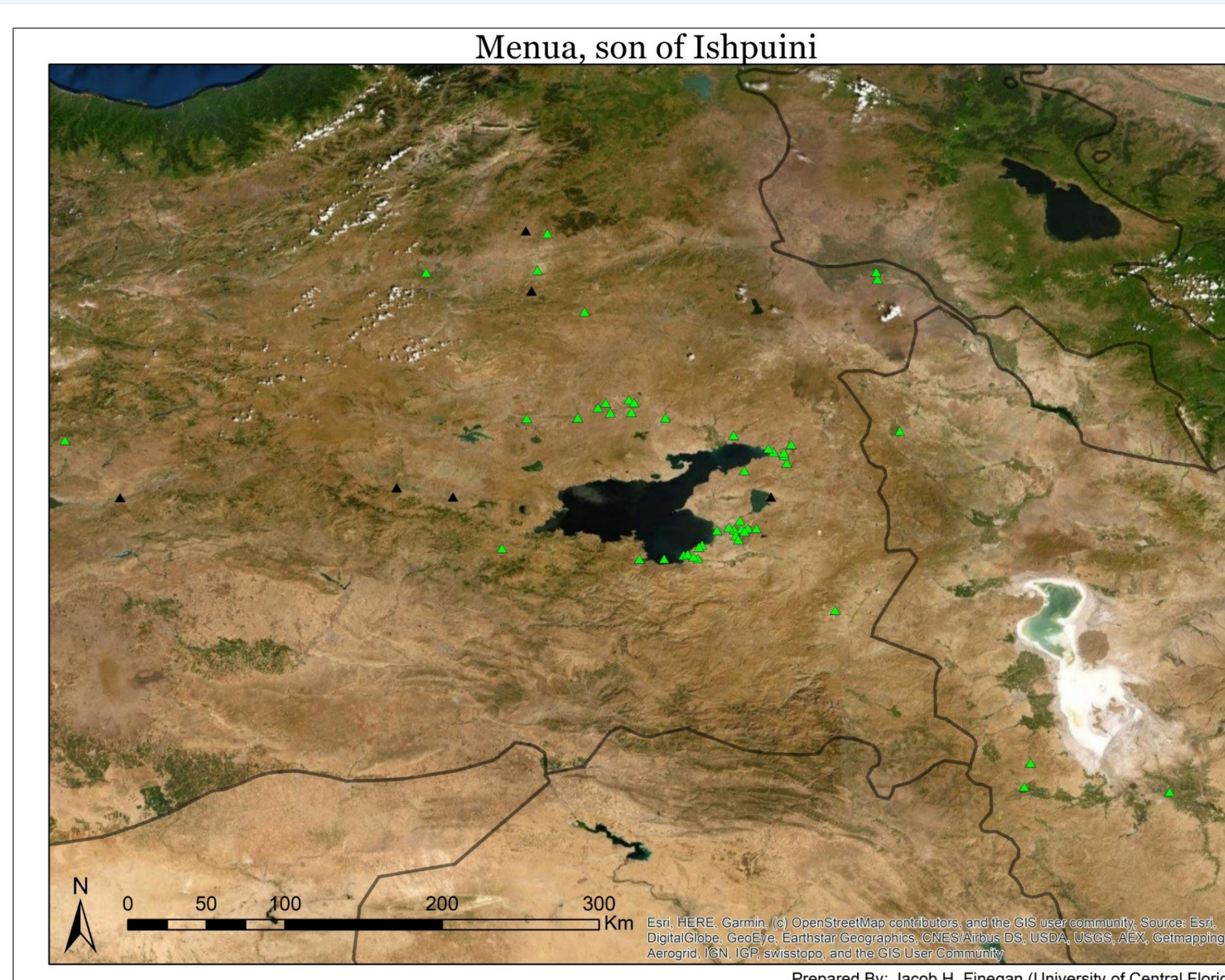
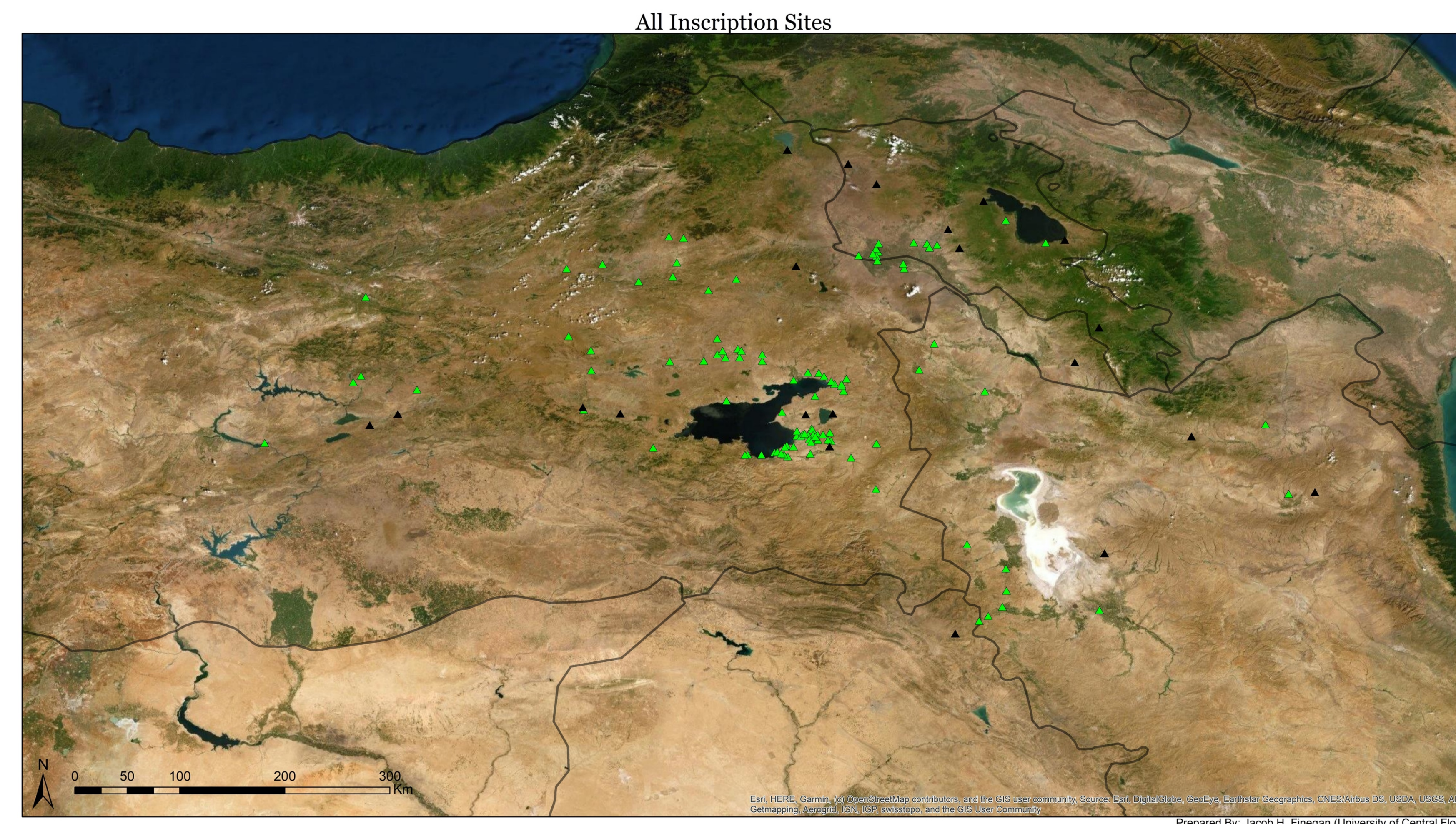
We mapped stone *in-situ* celebratory inscriptions from the CTU using publicly available databases and resources e.g. (<http://geonames.nga.mil/gns/>)

We produced 14 individual maps, ruler-by-ruler, which show the dedicatory activities of each king. Due to the inscriptions’ association with individual rulers, the data from the CTU allow Urartu to be examined on a finer, historical timescale.

Rock-cut inscriptions were used as proxy indicators of Urartian presence due to their association with built structures. Since rock-cut inscriptions and fortresses are exclusively imperial installations (Zimansky 1995), they suggest Urartian presence more convincingly than other artifact types.

## Selected Maps by Ruler

Sites featuring dedicatory inscriptions are symbolized with yellow triangles. Those featuring military inscriptions only, with no other celebratory texts present, are symbolized with black triangles. Spatial patterning of royal inscriptions suggests a fragmentary frontier. The initial establishment of control nodes followed by a subsequent clustering of sites in certain regions depicts a thickening web of control.



## Conclusions

- The historically-phased visualizations are better representations of the expansion and subsequent contraction of the Urartian empire.
- The historically-phased maps visualize the imperial takeover of new areas that, in many cases, begin with military campaigns followed by building projects.
- The project compliments contemporary scholarship which views Urartu as a network empire: a non-territorial polity that is centered around fortified nodes of influence.
- The findings challenge the plausibility of defining “borders” in certain ancient Near Eastern states like Urartu.

## Next Steps

- To create narrative Story Maps that integrate maps and history.
- To animate visualizations of CTU inscriptions.
- To contribute to Open Archeology initiatives by making the locations of all inscriptions a publicly available dataset for both research and teaching.

## References

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