

The Museum of the Templo Mayor

The Museum of the Templo Mayor, designed by architect Pedro Ramírez Vázquez, was created to display more than 7,000 objects found in excavations which took place between 1978 and 1982 at the site of what was once the main temple of the Mexicas.

Inaugurated on October 12th, 1987, the museum recreates the duality of life and death, water and war, agriculture and tribute, symbols of Tlaloc and Huitzilopochtli, deities to whom the Main Temple of Tenochtitlan was dedicated.



View of the facade of the
Museum of the Templo Mayor



Photo by José Ignacio González Manterola

Tlaltecuhctli

A few steps from the museum foyer lies the imposing relief of Tlaltecuhctli, the Earth goddess of the Mexicas. A monolith weighing almost 12 tons that was originally placed at the foot of the Main Temple was discovered in October 2006 on the property of the Nava Chávez estate, on the corner of Guatemala and Argentina Streets.

Thanks to 3 years of arduous and detailed restoration work, the visitor can see the impressive representation of this deity in its original polychrome.

Historical Background

This room presents a panorama of the research developed about the Mexica culture since the first archeological discoveries in 1790 until the present time. A model at the entrance to the room illustrates the places where the most important pre-Hispanic pieces were found in the main square of Mexico City.

The visitor can see objects found in the first excavations of the Main Temple from the beginning of the 20th century until the Templo Mayor Project, initiated in 1978 as a result of the discovery of the great circular sculpture of the goddess Coyolxauhqui.

The main discoveries of that stage include more than 100 offerings deposited by the Mexicas during the different construction phases of the building. Considering the form in which they were deposited, three types of offerings have been identified: as filling, in cists, and in chests, all of which are on display in this room.

In 1991, the **Urban Archeological Program** (Programa de Arqueología Urbana / PAU) began with the objective of bringing about archeological work in the area originally occupied by the sacred precinct of Tenochtitlan, which actually comprises 7 city blocks surrounding the Main Temple. The work of PAU has permitted an increase of knowledge about the development of Mexico City from pre-Hispanic times to the present.



Eagle *Cuauhxicalli*.
Photo by Luis Antonio Zavala

ROOM 2

War and Sacrifice

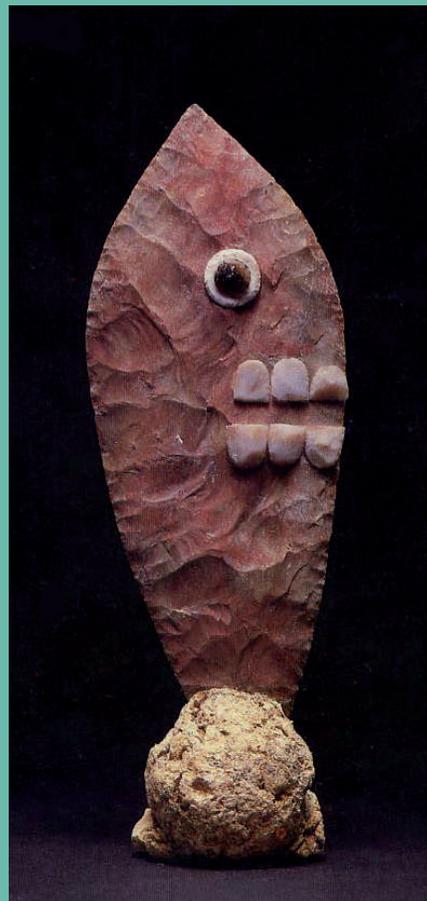
Many of the pieces recovered during excavations formed part of offerings deposited by the Mexicas in the Main Temple as gifts to their gods with the purpose of asking for good crops and war victories, among other favors.

At the entry to the room lie funerary offerings which were located in the Temple to Huitzilopochtli corresponding to Stage II, and surely correspond to important Mexica dignitaries at the end of the 14th century or the beginning of the 15th.

Symbolic objects representative of the different types of offerings, such as musical instruments, knives, skulls, braziers and green stone masks, as well as a funerary urn with the beautifully carved image of Mictlantecuhtli, god of death, are also displayed.



Skull Mask. Photo by Luis Antonio Zavala



Knife Face. Photo by Michel Zabé



Tribute and Trade

The Mexica economic, political and military domination over a large extension of Mesoamerica, exercised from 1430 to 1519 was expressed by paid tribute and control over main trade routes.

Trade was crucial to the Mexicas since tradesmen or *pochtecas* carried out not only trade activities, but also military espionage on the peoples they intended to conquer.

As a result of wars of expansion tribute was imposed on subjugated groups in various ways.

The materials obtained during the excavations at the Main Temple include varied raw materials and elaborated products proceeding from places which were far from Tenochtitlan, an expression of the practice of both war and trade.



Olmec Mask.

Photo by Luis Antonio Zavala

Huitzilopochtli

Pieces related to Huitzilopochtli lie in this room, including outstanding pieces such as:

- A ceramic sculpture of an Eagle Warrior found beside another very similar piece in the House of Eagles, a building located in the northern section of the archeological zone.
- Several stone sculptures found leaning against the stairway corresponding to Stage III of the Templo Mayor are likely to represent the Centzon Huitznahua, Huitzilopochtli's brothers. Some structures were used as flag bearers.
- A monumental stone sculpture of a "fire serpent" or *xiuhcoatl*, Huitzilopochtli's mythic weapon.

Other remarkable pieces are a beautiful sculpture of *Huehueteotl*, the old god of fire, who occupies the center of the universe, and another piece representing *Mayahuel*, the goddess of the century plant and pulque, the fermented drink made of its sap. The sculpture of *Mayahuel* is accompanied by different objects that were part of the offering where the piece was found. The room includes three sculptures: a squatting human figure representing one of the *ahuiateteo*, gods related to voluptuousness and lust, a sculpture of a *chihuateteo*, women who died in childbirth and were deified, and a bas relief of *Tlaltecuhтли*, Earth deity carved on the bottom of a larger sculpture. Warriors who died in battle or on the sacrificial stone, as well as women who died in childbirth, after being devoured by *Tlaltecuhтли*, enjoy the privilege of accompanying the Sun in its daily journey.



Eagle Warrior.
Photo by Michel Zabé



Coyolxauhqui Goddess. Photo by Michel Zabé

Coyolxauhqui

According to a Mexica myth, this goddess, whose name means “she whose cheeks are adorned with rattles,” died in combat with Huitzilopochtli, her brother, at the peak of Coatepec, a mountain near Tula because she had intended to kill Coatlicue, their mother, believed to also be the mother of all the gods. Upon overcoming and decapitating her, Huitzilopochtli launched her body off the mountain, which dismembered as she fell.

For these reasons, the sculpture, carved in trachyandesite, measuring 3.25 meter in diameter and weighing almost 8 tons, was originally located at the foot of the stairway that leads to the Huitzilopochtli temple. It represents the goddess attired as a warrior, decapitated and dismembered, with blood flowing from her wounds.

Tlaloc Vessel.

Photo by Luis Antonio Zavala



Tlaloc

The northern side of the Main Temple of Tenochtitlan was consecrated to Tlaloc, god of rain, whose name probably means “he who is made of earth.” For this reason, the four rooms of the Museum that are located on the northern half of the building, i.e., rooms 5 to 8 are dedicated to this god and aspects generally related to water and fertility.

In this room, Tlaloc welcomes the visitor, personified on a blue vessel. These vessels are a symbol of fertility since they were used to contain water, a vital element for a society mostly dedicated to agriculture, which is why the rain god’s face often appears on this type of vessel.

This room displays other elements associated with Tlaloc:

Offering 41, found at the foot of the stairway that leads to the temple, contains different representations of fertility-related objects and animals as well as of the lake system to which Tenochtitlan belong.

Small sculptures of the *tlaloque*, Tlaloc’s assistants who participate in the important task of bringing rain to the earth.

A monolithic sculpture of a conch sea shell representing fertility.



Stone conch shell.

Photo by Michel Zabé

ROOM 6

Flora and Fauna

(Under remodeling)



Agriculture

Agriculture was one of the main vital activities of the Mexica people. There were thus various deities related to maize and other relevant plants, such as the century plant, which were worshiped in the course of the feasts marked by the ritual calendar. These plants are represented in the Main Temple offerings.

Among these deities, we can find Chalchiuhtlicue (“she whose skirt is made of *chalchihuites* [precious stones]”), goddess of land waters and Tlaloc’s consort; Chicomecoatl (“seven snake”), goddess of ripe maize; Xipe Totec, god related to the regeneration of maize; and, of course, the rain god.

The most important indigenous plants, such as maize, beans, squash, chili, tomato and amaranth (*huauhtli* in Nahuatl) are shown in this room, as well as the basic tools used for agriculture in pre-Hispanic times. A model illustrates the intensive system of *chinampas*, primarily developed in the southern region of the Basin of Mexico. Tenochtitlan obtained a good part of its supplies through the *chinampa* system.

The room culminates with a reproduction of a part of the Tlatelolco market or tianguis (*tianquiztli* in Nahuatl), the largest and most important market in the region, which marveled the Spanish conquerors due to the vast number of goods and people in circulation.



Chalchiuhtlicue Vessel.
Photo by Mauricio Marat

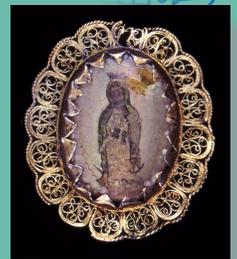
Historical Archeology

This room illustrates the impact of both the Spanish arrival in 1519 and the consummation of the conquest in 1521 producing the fall of Tenochtitlan and the dramatic transformation of the political and cultural reality of the land, then called New Spain. The fragments of a monumental sculpture of the goddess Coyolxauhqui that had surely been installed during the later construction phases of the Main Temple, similar to the one that was found complete, are clear evidence of this impact. Upon finding it, the conquerors proceeded to destroy it.

Column bases and shields belonging to the houses that the conquerors built on top of the ruins of the Templo Mayor are also on display. Different objects from the period of New Spain or colonial times recovered by excavations can also be seen. Many of these objects arrived in New Spain thanks to the commercial bridge established as of 1575, called the Manila Galleon or “Nao de China [Ship from China],” through which Spanish ships landed in Acapulco from the Philippines loaded with Eastern goods.

Many of these products stayed in New Spain, and others were transported by land to Veracruz, where they continued their journey to Spain. At the same time, these commercial contacts enabled the emergence of local manufacturing which imitated European styles, as in the case of dinner sets and figures for Christmas crèches.

Objects belonging to a colonial offering deposited in 1790 with the foundation stone for the construction of the All Souls Chapel at the rear of the Metropolitan Cathedral were found by archeologists of the Urban Archeology Program on November 6, 1996. The last section of the room displays objects from the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century, recovered from the subsoil levels closest to the surface during excavations at the Main Temple.



Colonial Medal.
Front View



Colonial Medal.
Back View

Museum of the Templo Mayor

Seminario No. 8, next to the National Palace
Historical Center of Mexico City.

Attention and Information:

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Hours:

Tuesdays thru Sundays from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm.
Closed on Mondays.

Mexican teachers and students with up-to-date identification,
elderly people, people with different abilities and children
under 13 are admitted free-of-charge.

Free admission on Sundays and bank holidays.

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