



EL TEPOZTECO

Morelos

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Sometime around AD 1150 the collapse of Toltec cities and the contraction of the frontiers of Mesoamerica triggered migrations of multiple populations. Among them were Nahua groups that entered the Central Highlands. Between 1200 and 1220 the Xochimilcas occupied the southern part of the Basin of Mexico and the northern part of the modern-day state of Morelos, occupying and founding the towns of Tepoztlán, Totolapan, Tlayacapan, Ocuituco, Tetela, and Hueyapan, among others. The original population, predecessors of the Popolocas and Mixtecs, were probably forced into the Puebla-Tlaxcala region or were assimilated by the Nahua newcomers. The domain of Tepoztlán controlled the towns of San Juan Tlacotenco (Tepecuytlapilco), Santa Catarina (Cacatepetlac), San Andrés de la Cal (Acacueyacan), Santo Domingo (Xocotitlan), Amatlán, and Santiago Tepetlapa. The limits of this Xochimilca dominion were Xochimilco to the north, Yauhtepec and Xihutepec to the south, Cuauhnáhuac to the west, and Totolapan and Tlayacapan to the east.

GET READY TO EXPLORE

In the chamber and antechamber of the temple, the bench remains have reliefs that show a text composed of signs clearly exemplifying the non-linguistic written communication system used in the Postclassic period. The text refers to the god Tepoztecatl, to sacrifice and the responsibilities and power of rulers; all the signs are shown carried by spurs of water and blood, *atl-tlachinolli*, “burnt water,” which symbolizes the union of cold, earthly, feminine forces and the hot, celestial, masculine forces that gave life to the universe.

Diverse signs are associated with the power of rulers: the plumed jaguar represents the courage of warriors, as one of the leading orders in the Mexica military structure, which refers to power and bravery in battle.

The Sanctuary of Tepoztecatl

The buildings in the capital of the domain of Tepoztlán extended along the cliffs framing the northwest of the valley of the same name. For the Tepoztecos the rock formation and its summit were a sacred space, because as part of the Mesoamerican tradition, they believed this place merged the cold forces of the underworld with the hot powers of the sky that give origin to time, life, and movement.



PLACE NAME	Tepoztlán is composed of the Nahuatl words <i>tepuchtli</i> (back) and <i>tlan</i> (high place), so that Tepoztlán is the “Place of the high backs,” probably in reference to the rocky formations in the region resembling towering stony backs.
CULTURE	With an early Xochimilca affiliation, it was later consolidated as a distinctive culture on its own known as Tepozteca that set itself apart from its neighbors, who were also Xochimilcas, and the Tlahuicas, who occupied the southern portion of Morelos.
PERIOD	Tepoztlán was established around 1220 and continued until the fall of the Mexica Empire as a result of the Spanish conquest in 1521. However, the site was never abandoned and Tepoztlán continued to have a rich history in viceregal and modern times.
DATES	Middle and Late Postclassic (AD 1220–1521)



HOW TO GET THERE

Once you are in Tepoztlán, take the main street and follow the signs to go to the archaeological site of the same name. Take the necessary precautions, because it is a 2-kilometer uphill walk.

ADMISSION

According to the Federal Fees Act, admission is free for students, teachers, and seniors with a valid ID; children under 13; and people with a disability. Sundays: Free admission to the Mexican public and foreign residents.

PHOTOGRAPHY

For the use of any device to make videos, visitors must pay the fee stipulated by the Ministry of Public Finance. Non-professional photography, without the use of tripods, is free of charge.

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HOURS

Monday to Sunday from 8 am to 4 pm.
(You must arrive by 3:30 pm to enter the site).

TEXTS

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ARCHITECTURE

For the construction of the sanctuary, the ancient Tepoztecas did major land work on the rocky formation. In order to increase the area available for construction, in some zones they cut the rock and in others they added and rock soil, contained by tall walls. In this way the Tepoztecas created sprawling terraces on which they constructed the temple and rooms. Some of the construction materials used in the pyramidal platform and the temple are not from the rocky cliff. Instead, they used lime from San Andrés de la Cal and volcanic *tezontle* stone from San Juan Tlacotenco, which was transported on the shoulders of Tepozteco burden bearers.

The massive rock where the sanctuary is located is composed of three lobes and a central area where the three come together. The west lobe houses the Temple of Tepoztecatl, an architectural complex composed of three elements: the temple, its associated rooms, and the plaza.

The temple is composed of a large platform, on which a plaza and a platform articulated with a sloped *talud* and rectangular *tablero* apron molding. The temple, which has two rooms and a vestibule, stands on the platform. The antechamber was the most sacred part of the temple: there stood the effigy of the god Tepoztecatl, along with his sacred bundle—a small cache of objects believed to have been given by the god himself—which together with man—were one of the most effective channels to community with the divine realm.

HIGHLIGHTS



On the molding of the outer walls of the temple are five niches on each of the north, east, and south faces, and in the interior they each contained a skull. There must have been fifteen skulls in total, but only seven have been preserved. Supposing that five other skulls were on the other façade, it would be a total of twenty skulls, one for each of the signs of the ritual calendar.

1507

In 1894 architect Francisco Rodríguez found two carvings in the rubble of the temple pyramid. The first was a stone that became known as the “Ahuizotl Slab,” that represents the name of the Mexica emperor; this piece is now in the Mexica Hall of the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City. The second is a relief bearing the calendrical date 10 Rabbit, but its current whereabouts are unknown.



The temple pilasters have remains on the lower part of a sign that represent a *chalchihuitl*, a greenstone bead symbolizing “preciousness” with a ring of feathers and four large shell beads at the four



ESSENTIALS:

- A** Main plaza
- B** Temple antechamber
- C** Temple chamber (Sanctum sanctorum)
- D** South rooms
- E** Guard room
- F** Main house
- G** Residential terraces
- H** Lookout



DID YOU KNOW THAT ...

- The talud and tablero molding is extremely common in the Postclassic period. In fact it is among the earliest structures when it is found, for example, at Teopanzolco, where just as in the temple of Tepoztecatl it appears on the four sides of the structure.
- The stairway that leads to the temple of Tepoztecatl has wide balustrades and thirteen steps.
- The number of steps (thirteen) is of special significance, because it is related to the conception of the Mesoamerican universe. There were thirteen days that composed the “week” in the 260-day ritual calendar, known as the **tonalpohualli**. There were also thirteen heavens in the Mesoamerican universe.



AND DON'T MISS...

- The east lobe of the rocky formation offers a spectacular view of the valleys of Cuautla and Tepoztlán. Cuautla is visible to the left from the lookout, while Tepoztlán is the nearby town. Between the Valley of Cuautla and that of Cuernavaca stand the mountains of the Sierra Montenegro.
- The marvelous monastic complex of the Anunciación, the former Dominican monastery built in the sixteenth century.
- The Pellicer Museum, which exhibits an important collection of Mesoamerican archaeological pieces.
- A stroll through the streets of the town of Tepoztlán and the small chapels in the barrios of San Miguel, Los Reyes, Santo Domingo, and La Santísima.



The good state of preservation of the Temple of Tepoztecatl makes it possible to better understand the Mesoamerican world, one transformed and adapted through the centuries and countless social processes, and changes in fortune that we can trace in the adventures of Tepoztecatl, the hero who slayed the monster of Xochicalco as recalled in legends.