



XOCHITÉCATL

Tlaxcala

GET READY TO EXPLORE

The civic-religious architectural complex of Xochitécatl is in the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley, in the mountainous Nativitas-Atlachino-Xochitécatl block. The ceremonial complex is composed of four structures arranged around a sizable plaza.

Building of the Serpent

On the south sides of the main plaza, this structure has a rectangular plan and dates to the Middle Preclassic, coeval with the Pyramid of the Flowers and the Spiral. The building has three construction stages and was built with cobble stones of different sizes mortared with mud. The southwest corner of the building appears rounded and set on a straight angle base, unlike the other corners, which have 90° angles. This anomaly probably resulted from the collapse of the structure over time and was not part of the original plan. Monolithic Basin 3 was found in the center of the upper part of the structure. It contained an animal sculpture in its interior. Evidence also indicated a specialized obsidian workshop. A few meters to the northeast, two additional sculptures were discovered, one an animal and the other, human. Archaeologists also found abundant ceramics (mostly gourd-shaped vessels and others with incised decoration, figurines, and earflares of different sizes), along with lithics (a flint knife, numerous obsidian blades, scrapers, and chips).

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The monumental zone of Xochitécatl has a spacious central plaza surrounded by ceremonial structures. Sculpture and figurines found there suggest the ceremonial center was symbolically linked to nature and fertility. Here you can visit the Pyramid of the Flowers, the building called the Spiral, the Building of the Serpent, and the Platform of the Volcanoes, which were abandoned after a major eruption of Mount Popocatépetl in AD 100.

The ceremonial architectural complex was built on the summit of an extinct volcano also known as Xochitécatl. The site was no doubt chosen for its strategic location in the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley in an area connecting the rich coastal plains of the Gulf of Mexico with the Mixteca, the Basin of Mexico, the Valley of Morelos, and north-central Veracruz, which made this a key region on multiple trade routes.

Archaeological excavations and surveys conducted at the site have shed light on regional historical and cultural processes that shaped its development.

Studies examine the presence of foreigners, the rise of autonomous rival states in the region after the decline of Teotihuacan, the validity and cultural depth of information in local historical sources, and changes in the environment and systems of production, consumption, and exploitation of natural resources during its different phases of occupation.

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| PLACE NAME | "Flower lineage place" (from the Nahuatl <i>xochitl</i> : flower and <i>tecatl</i> : place) (Tibón, 1959:13). In the codex of the same name, the hill was known as Xochitecatzin and in the 1930s it was given the name Xochitecatitla |
| CULTURE | Evidence of Otomí occupation |
| PERIOD | Middle Preclassic–Epiclassic–Early Postclassic |
| DATES | Occupation began in the Middle Preclassic (800 BC) with major development from 400 BC to AD 100 and in the Epiclassic from AD 650 to 900. |

Platform of the Volcanoes

Standing in the middle of the plaza, this rectangular building has a layout and 10° orientation unlike that of the other buildings at the site. As a later construction (AD 900), its four sides have facing stones, joined with mud and covered with stucco. Its north and south facades are 33 m (108 ft.) long and the others 45 m (148 ft.). Traces of a system of sloped and rectangular (*talud-tablero*) panels, which probably covered the building, have been found. Stairways on the east-west facades are preserved, and the one on the west might have had balustrades. Remains of a wall with a central stairway were found on the summit from a structure coeval with the rest of the monument.

The Spiral

This building was apparently built during the Middle Preclassic on the west side of the plaza. Cut tuff facing and round cobble stone were joined with mud in its construction. The structure's foundation was adapted to the natural slope of the terrain, which has a strong incline on the east side. The numerous ceramic objects were recovered from this structure. They included a complete clay female figurine, with traces of red paint on the headdress and body traits typical of the Late Preclassic, and an offering composed of an undecorated round-bodied pot, covered with a bowl lid and containing small animal bones with cranial deformation. Associated with this offering was a burial that held only the skull of an adult with cranial deformation. An infant's burial was recovered on the southeast side.



HOW TO GET THERE

From Mexico City, take highway 150 to the turnoff to San Rafael Tenayecac (Km 99); take this turnoff and follow the signs to Nativitas. At the turnoff to San José Atoyatenco, continue 50 m (164 ft.) and take the road that goes to the entrance to the Monumental Zone of Xochitécatl.

ADMISSION

According to the Federal Fees Act, admission is free for children 13 or younger, students, and teachers with a valid ID, seniors, retirees, and pensioners, disabled people, and INAH researchers.

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PHOTOGRAPHY

For the use of any device to make videos, visitors must pay the amount set by the Secretary of Finance. Non-professional photography, without the use of tripods, is free of cost.

HOURS

Monday to Sunday from 9:00 am to 6:00 pm

TEXTS

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 The information on the site is primarily from publications by Dr. Mari Carmen Serra Puche (1998, 2004, 2014).

PRODUCTION

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SECRETARÍA DE CULTURA



INAH

MAIN ATTRACTION

Pyramid of the Flowers

By far the largest structure at the site, it dominates the east side of the plaza. The central staircase and Monolithic Basins 1 and 2 were found near the front of the summit. The basins contained four sculptures (including one animal, two human), and other architectural elements, such as columns, lintels, and blocks of stone were also found. The earliest phase of the building was constructed over an earth core, with round stones and *tepetate* volcanic stone, mortared with mud. In the second building phase, small slabs and facing stone were used to build walls, a technique that was modified again in the third phase (Postclassic), when less labor-intensive adobe became the characteristic material.

Most of the archaeological materials from Xochitécatl were discovered here. They included thirty burials (almost all infants) accompanied by lavish offerings of shell, jade, and obsidian. The ceramics recovered correspond to various shapes and wares, with pan-Mesoamerican decoration. Archaeologists also found clay female figurines that display the woman's life cycle, ranging from wide-hipped figurines, with rounded belly and narrow waist, some with elegant attire, to others depicted as pregnant, mother and child figures, priestesses, elderly and young women alike, not to mention hollow figurines with movable limbs.

ARCHITECTURE

In buildings at Xochitécatl in both the Preclassic (Formative) and Epiclassic periods, the people used earth and tepetate stone as construction fill and for facades and foundations. From the start, tepetate, found at the bedrock layer, was the most commonly used material at the ceremonial center, as well as in housing units on the surrounding terraces.

WHERE TO SEE PIECES FOUND AT THE SITE

The figurine offering found in the stairway of the Pyramid of the Flowers is on display in the Site Museum. Many of these pieces represent the woman's life cycle, including birth, maternity, childcare, old age, and death, as well as other figures connected to the site's history.



The importance of women is clear in the offering of female figurines suggesting rites and female veneration associated with fertility. Women are depicted as speakers, participants in ritual, lavishly dressed, some pregnant, others carrying babies or with infants in cradles, as warriors, and as elders. Some have movable limbs and are hollow rattles.

ESSENTIALS

- A** Site Museum
- B** Monolithic Basin 1 and 2
- C** Monolithic Basin 3

- 1 Pyramid of the Flowers
- 2 The Spiral
- 3 Building of the Serpent
- 4 Buildings of the Volcanoes
- 5 Walkway

AND DO NOT MISS ...

- A visit to the Great Platform of Cacaxtla, the hill 850 m (½ mile) east of Xochitécatl, and its Site Museum. It is famed for its murals in a style evoking the faraway Maya area.
- To sample local fare you have three options: 1) home-style dishes at the restaurant beside the Cacaxtla Site Museum; 2) traditional handmade quesadillas near the ticket booth at Cacaxtla; 3) a visit to the nearby town of San José Atoyatenco, north of the monumental zone of Xochitécatl, where the specialty is carp baked in traditional ovens, along with local regional snacks.
- Visit the seventeenth-century church of San Miguel de Milagro in Nativitas, a year-round pilgrimage site for travelers from the State of Mexico and Puebla. The biggest celebration is the "fair" held for thirty days in the month of September.
- Also visit the Community Museum in San José Atoyatenco, where you can see pieces from the site donated by the townspeople.



DID YOU KNOW?

- The earliest reference to the site of Xochitécatl is from 1883, when it was said that "Xochitécatl formed part of a series of fortifications that covered a mountain."
- The archaeological zone stands on a volcanic elevation in the southwestern part of the state of Tlaxcala in the municipality of Nativitas.
- Xochitécatl was a center for fertility worship until the time of the conquest.
- The earliest settlements in the region were built by sedentary groups dating back as early as 1600–1200 BC. The people lived from farming, complemented by fishing, hunting, and gathering wild fruit and plants.
- Today the building known as The Spiral has served as a pilgrimage spot for the people of the town of San Rafael Tenanyecac, who venerate a cross on the top of the structure.



SOME FIGURES

The Pyramid of the Flowers measures some 144 m (472 ft.) on its north and south sides by 100–115 m (328–377 ft.) on the east and west.

The archaeological zones of Cacaxtla and Xochitécatl form part of a multi-component archaeological complex within an area spanning 335 hectares (or about 828 acres).

The building known as The Spiral has the shape of a truncated cone, with a round base whose circumference has a diameter of 49.49 m (162 ft.). On the west side it reaches a height of 15.60 m (51 ft.).

Restoration work began at the site between 1992 and 1994, employing 1000 workers.