



FORMER FRANCISCAN CONVENT OF OUR LADY OF THE ASSUMPTION, TECAMACHALCO

Puebla



HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

After the monastery of Tepeaca was founded, Tecamachalco became a settlement visited periodically by a missionary until the construction of its own convent. The first missionary to make incursions in this area was Fray Diego de Estremena, the regional ecclesiastical head of the monastery of Tepeaca. The convent of Tecamachalco was established by Francisco de las Navas in 1541 and consecrated to Our Lady of the Assumption in the capital of the domain of the Popoloca people. It was a church and convent that featured all the characteristics known to sixteenth-century structures. Inside the church, built between 1551 and 1557, a group of twenty-eight paintings on the ceiling in the space under the choir loft offers a unique visual interpretation of the Old and New Testament. Juan Gerson was the indigenous painter of these images, made in 1562 in an unusual technique: tempera paint on amate bark paper. As was the taste and custom among the local indigenous population, the walls of the church and monastery were decorated with frescoes, some fragments of which can still be seen. In 1643 the parish church was built, shifting the center of the town to what is today the central square, diminishing the former importance of the convent, which resulted in its abandonment and deterioration.



PLACE NAME

Tecamachalco got its name in the Late Postclassic period. The place name in Nahuatl means "in the stone jaw." The archaeological site of Tecamachalco El Viejo is the ancient seat of the pre-Hispanic settlement, on a hilltop difficult to access, near the modern-day town of San Simón Yehualtepec.

HOW TO GET THERE

Tecamachalco is in southeastern Puebla, 56 km from the state capital (the City of Puebla). The city has two entrances, one on the north side via the Mexico-Veracruz highway and the other on the Puebla-Tehuacán federal highway. Convent address: Calle 7 Norte s/n (no number) between 2 Poniente and Avenida Guerrero, downtown Tecamachalco, Puebla.

SERVICES

Restrooms, ticket booth.

ADMISSION

\$45.00 pesos. 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 for Mexican citizens and foreign residents.

PHOTOGRAPHY

For the use of any device to make videos, visitors must pay the stipulated fee. Non-professional photography, without the use of tripods, is free of charge, and must be done without a flash.

HOURS

Wednesday to Sunday from 9:00 am to 6:00 pm.

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TEXTS

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PHOTOGRAPHY

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MAIN ATTRACTION

Coat-of-Arms

It features the eagle perched on a mountain range composed of the Techachal hills and Coauhtepec (eagle hill) where King Cuetzpal lived in 1441 and who gave the name to the site of Tecamachalco, "in the stone jaw." The interlaced water-fire symbol for sacred warfare, *atlachinolli* (burning water), emerges from the eagle's beak, while the volute-flower emblem for poetry, *in xochitl in cuicatl* (flower and song), emerges behind its crown. Arrows surrounding the eagle probably allude to the six towns that attacked Cuauhtepec, namely: Cuauhtinchan, Tepeaca, Cholula, Huejotzingo, Totoltepec, and Tlaxcala.

Below, three dates refer to 1589 and 1591 as the final construction stage. The church tower was completed in 1591 and viceroy Don Luis de Velasco paid a visit to these lands in 1590. On the left is the Mixtec symbol for the year 5 House and to the right, the day 7 Reed.

It clearly exemplifies the syncretism of the local indigenous population and the Spaniard newcomers that gave rise to new visual expressions.

Where to see it

At the base of the church tower of the former monastery.



COLLECTION

Today the former Convent of Tecamachalco has a permanent exhibition gallery in what was once the Chapel of the Third Order, where archaeological pieces found in the region are on display, as well as a series of early photos of the site.

BUILDING HIGHLIGHTS

- **The foundry.** Hydraulic construction dating to the sixteenth century.
- **Church of Saint Sebastian.** Built in 1732, it was the first to serve as a parish church in Tecamachalco.
- **Parish of Our Lady of the Assumption.** The architecture of the ecclesiastical structure displays a combination of classical, neoclassical, and contemporary styles. The church was built to honor the Virgin of the Assumption in 1732. Each year an all-night procession is held, in which the image of Our Lady of the Assumption is carried through the main barrios of this city.
- **Annual fair in honor of the Señor del Desmayo** (Lord of Fainting). It is held on the second Sunday of Lent, in honor of the image venerated in the former Franciscan Convent of Tecamachalco.
- **Day of the Dead Festival.** It is carried out in the former Franciscan monastery every year at the end of October and the beginning of November. It is one of the most important Day of the Dead traditions in Tecamachalco.

/GALLERIES

• What to see

The monastery seen from the lower part of the city is awe-inspiring and suggests a fortress due to its crenellated facade.

It was built facing the town from east to west.

The convent group has two entrances, a side entrance on the south side on the small street known as the Callejón de la Hermandad (Alleyway of Brotherhood) and the main entrance on the west side, facing the atrium, which lacks an arcade.

The original wall around the complex must have been made of a humble material with a simple design, but only traces of it remain standing on the south side. The atrium where the doctrine was taught to the native converts preserved the same open character as the ancient pre-Hispanic pyramidal platforms facing plazas.

The atrium stands before the main facade of the church, which retains a series of crenels evoking a parapet and a tower built in 1589 and 1591. Franciscan elements adorn the facade, such as the bas-relief emblem of five bleeding wounds and the Franciscan knotted cord. The church interior is composed of two side aisles and a nave leading to the apse. Its ceiling has ribbed vaults. It houses an impressive sixteenth-century baptismal font. Leaving the church, on the left is the monastery, which displays a simple facade composed of an arch connected to an open chapel above.

The entrance hall and guest quarters lead to the cloister on the south side of the church. Although this structure originally had two floors, only the ground floor is open to the public. It includes a portico, a vestibule, confessionals, niches (chapels) at each of the corners, the chapter hall, refectory, kitchen, storerooms, and other rooms attached to the church that served as a sacristy and other spaces to store liturgical objects. On the upper story of the cloister, the south side housed the monks' cells, and a library.

Convent gardens were commonly planted with citrus trees: such as limes, oranges, key limes, and grapefruit, because it was believed that the aroma of these plants calmed the nerves. A fountain or well usually stood in the center. The Franciscans spent much of the day in this space, some devoted to the doctrine, others to food preparation, while others went out to beg for alms, because they lived on charitable contributions.

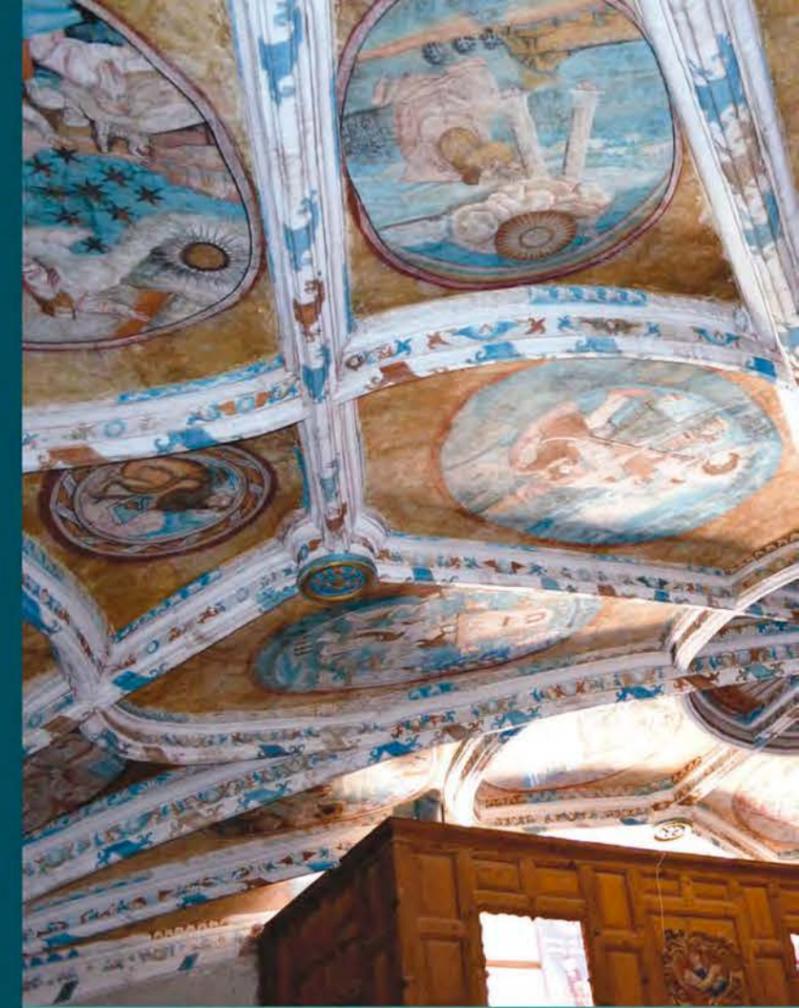


➔ ACCESS

ESSENTIALS:

- A** Chapel of the Third Order
- B** Chapter Hall
- C** Refectory
- D** Lower cloister
- E** Sala de Profundis (anterectory)
- F** Well
- G** Sacristy
- H** Ante-sacristy
- I** Punishment cell
- J** Altar
- K** Central nave
- L** Porciuncola (side door)
- M** Choir and Sotocoro (space under the choir)

- 1 Entrance portico
- 2 Gatehouse
- 3 Guest quarters
- 4 Vaulted niche
- 5 Kitchen
- 6 Vestibule



/ Since it was opened to the public more than thirty years ago, the former Franciscan Convent of Tecamachalco continues to be an iconic space in the city, regarded as the cultural heritage of Puebla and of the Mexican nation.

/ BUILDING HIGHLIGHTS

- 1541** The former Franciscan Convent of Tecamachalco dates to 1541.
- Other monastic complexes stand out for their art collection in the vault of the area below the choir loft.
- Juan Gerson, *tlacuilo* (painter) of Tecamachalco, was the artist who did these tempera paintings on *amate* bark paper.
- It still preserves vestiges of mural painting and sculptures, such as the majestic sixteenth-century baptismal font.
- The museum interior displays the will of Don Rodrigo de Vivero y Aberruzza, First Count of the vale of Orizaba and *encomendero* of Tecamachalco. He was responsible for the treaties of brotherhood between Tecamachalco, Puebla, Mexico, and Onjuku, Japan.

