

Symbols and myths that indicate the place that the Mexica god chose to establish the city underlie the founding of Tenochtitlan in 1325 A.D.

Once the prophesized site was found, the Mexicas proceeded to build a temple dedicated to the Mexica god Huitzilopochtli. Huitzilopochtli decreed that the city be divided into four neighborhoods (*barrios*), which were meant to demarcate the four directions of the universe, with the Main Temple in the center.

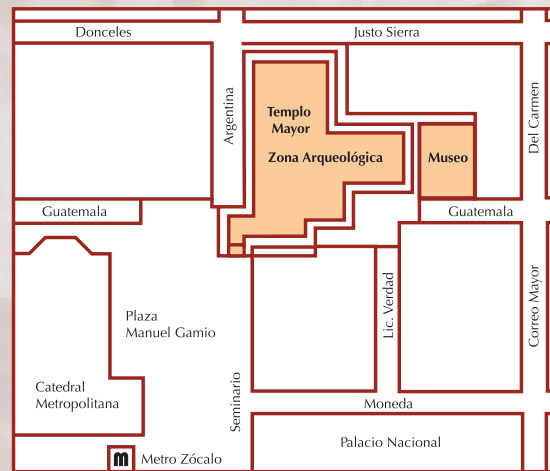
This first temple must have been small and made of perishable materials since they did not have advanced construction methods and had to make use of the resources that the island provided.

However, after their independence from the rule of Azcapotzalco in 1430, the building started to be enlarged. On the one hand, each ruler built a larger and more beautiful temple on top of the previous pyramid. On the other, Tenochtitlan endured floods which forced the level of the buildings to be raised. At the same time, the marshy nature of the land led to architectural problems due to sinking.

The sacred complex of Tenochtitlan was large and square-shaped with stone flooring and several buildings that were used for religious purposes. Through archeological excavation, 36 structures have been identified, including buildings, altars, ballcourts, and *tzompantli* (wall of skulls).



Fragment of the Codex Mendoza



### 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

# Ceremonial Complex

## Templo Mayor



Text by Laura del Olmo Frese. Cover: Knife with a Face, Mexica Culture. Photography by Mauricio Marat. Design by Luz Ma. Muñoz de la Sota Riva / MTM.



# Ceremonial Complex

The complex was surrounded by a staired platform, which demarcated the sacred space from the rest of the city. It had a pier to the east, and three or four main entries, from which three large causeways parted: the Iztapalapa road led south; the Tacuba road, west and the Tepeyac road, north. Each temple was dedicated to a specific deity and had specific functions.

## 1. The Main Temple

A double temple dedicated to Tlaloc, god of rain and Huitzilopochtli, god of war. The main religious festivals of the Mexica were celebrated here.

## 2. Semi-circular Temple

Dedicated to Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl, god of wind and creator of human life.

## 3. Tzompantli (wall of skulls)

The rack where the skulls of prisoners captured in war were displayed as trophies. This consisted of two architectural structures joined by wooden crossbars the width of a spear, along which human skulls were threaded.

## 4. Ballcourt

Ritual games between two teams using a rubber ball took place in this I-shaped court. It was located next to the Tzompantli since there was a very close relation between the ballgame and decapitation.

## 5. House of Eagles

A compound with several rooms where rituals related to the ascent to power of the Mexica rulers took place.

## 6. House of Jaguars

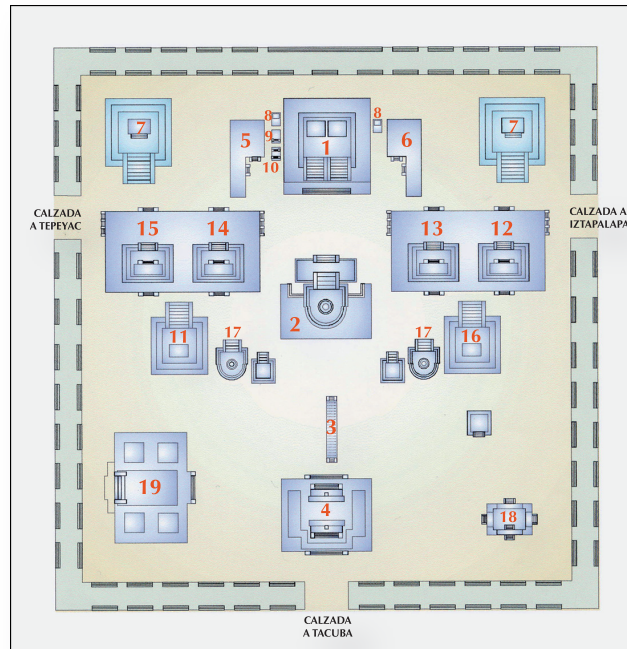
The jaguar warriors enacted ritual ceremonies in this compound.

## 7. Tezcatlipoca Temple

It lies to the south of the Main Temple, is painted red and oriented toward the West.

## 8. Southern Red Temple and Northern Red Temple

These two small structures flanking the Main Temple are decorated with red paintings, imitating the Teotihuacan style. They were dedicated to the god Xochipilli.



## 9. Tzompantli Altar

A small structure with its stairway oriented to the west and decorated with over 240 stone skulls. It is located to the north of the Main Temple, perhaps indicating the way toward Mictlan, the place of the dead.

## 10. Shrine A

This shrine was built on top of a platform with two stairways, one to the east and one to the west, perhaps showing the path of the Sun. It is located next to the north facade of the Main Temple.

## 11. Shrine of Xochipilli

Decorated with red paint, this is the small altar where a sculpture of Xochipilli, god of flowers and dance, associated with a large number of musical instruments was found.

## 12. Temple of Xochiquetzal

A good-size structure located below the main entrance to the Cathedral.

## 13. Temple of Chicomecoatl

A temple dedicated to the goddess of maize, the main ingredient of the Mexica diet.

## 14. Temple of Cihuatl

It lies below the palace of the Marquis of Apartado. Beautiful sculptures of an eagle *cuauhxicalli* vessel (Room 1 of the Museum of the Templo Mayor) and of a jaguar *cuauhxicalli* vessel (in the Mexica Room of the Museum of Anthropology) were found in this temple.

## 15. Temple of Coacalco

A temple with images of the deities worshiped in the provinces conquered by the Mexicas.

## 16. Temple of Tonatiuh or the Sun

A good-size structure oriented toward the East which lies below the Sacristy of the Metropolitan Cathedral.

## 17. Shrine of Ehecatl

A small circular temple perhaps dedicated to Ehecatl, god of wind since it is known that temples dedicated to this god were circular in form.

## 18. Tozpalatl

A natural water spring that formed a pool where the priests bathed before and after important ceremonies.

## 19. Calmecac

A place where young members of the Mexica nobility received an extremely strict education, including military and astronomical knowledge, codex reading, besides other arts. Quetzalcoatl was their patron god. At present, vestiges of the Calmecac can be seen at the Site Museum located in the basement of the Spanish Cultural Center (on #18 Guatemala Street).