

# The Xochimilco Archaeological Museum

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Photos by Daniel Munguia

Stone figure of a long-time inhabitant of the canals.

Xochimilco —that legendary town with the evocative, poetic Nahuatl name meaning “where flowers are grown,” for centuries an obligatory visit in the Mexico City area— still holds surprises. One is its archaeological museum, housed in a nineteenth-century building that was originally the pump station used in the Xochimilco aqueduct.

Built over the Santa Cruz Acalpíxca stream in the “floating garden” (or *chinampa*) community of the same name, its architecture is in the eclectic style characteristic of the *Porfiriato*, the period named for dictator Porfirio Díaz (1880-

1910): it boasts iron, steel tanks and reinforced concrete. Although planned in the European style, since the building is utilitarian, the decoration is sober; the facade of brick and stone is flanked by dentils at each corner.

The museum’s story dates back to the 1970s when a group of Xochimilcans interested in the history of their town organized a temporary exhibition of archeological pieces discovered when building their homes or planting their *chinampas*. The exhibit was mounted in the parish of Santa Cruz, where it attracted local people and visitors from outside to its different venues in libraries and cultural centers. In 1973, with the support of Dolores Olmedo,<sup>1</sup> efforts were

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\* Director of the Xochimilco Archaeological Museum.

made to turn the old pump house into a museum, which was inaugurated in 1979 by then-President José López Portillo.

One special thing about the museum is that the visitor can go there via a *trajinera* (a kind of boat commonly used in Xochimilco for transportation) that moors at the pier on the northern edge of the lavish garden surrounding the building.

The museum has more than 3,000 pieces, among them 10,000-year-old mammoth remains exhibited in the northeast corner of the building. These fossils, so well-preserved by the soil that they needed no restoring, prove that animals lived in the area during the Pleistocene epoch.

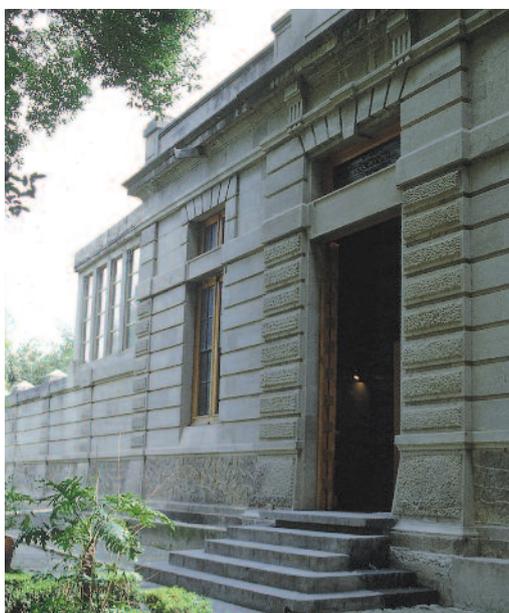
The Mexica stone glyphs from the archeological site at Cuailama, a few kilometers away, deserve special mention. Among them are the Cocolxóchitl (or dahlia, the symbol of Xochimilco residents), the Yoloxóchitl (the magnolia, or “flower of the heart”) and the Cuitlaxóchitl (or poinsettia). These figures can still be found on some civic and religious buildings.

The museum’s most important pieces, however, are the Teotihuacan burial sites found in the Xochimilco area near a stone workshop and the base of a pyramid, and brought to the muse-

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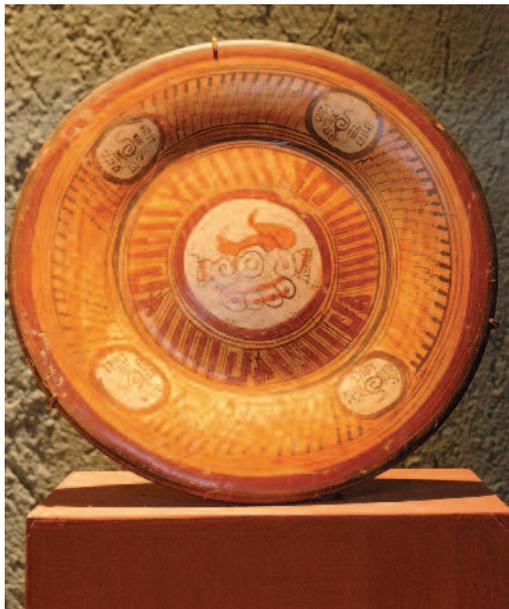


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Museum entrance and grounds. The nineteenth-century building was once a pump station.





The museum collection includes pieces belonging to different pre-Hispanic periods.



Among the most interesting pieces made of stone and clay are these seals (left) and the whistle in the shape of a dog (right).

um for exhibition. Some of the skulls in these burials show signs of intentional deformations reminiscent of the Maya. We should remember that the Teotihuacan culture stretched to the lake shores of the whole of the Valley of Mexico basin long before the Xochimilcas (one of the seven Nahuatl tribes) arrived. That is why it is not strange to find Teotihuacan remains in the Xochimilca region.

The museum also has a large collection of sculptures in clay, stone and other materials, a great deal of pottery for domestic and ritual use and a magnificent collection of seals.

Undoubtedly, this museum is a place to be discovered. **MM**

XOCHIMILCO ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM  
 AVENIDA TENOXITTLA (NO NUMBER)  
 AT THE CORNER OF LA PLANTA STREET  
 SANTA CRUZ ACALPIXCA, XOCHIMILCO  
 C.P. 16500  
 PHONE: 2157-1757  
 OPEN TUESDAY TO SUNDAY, 10 A.M. TO 5 P.M.  
 ADMITTANCE: ONE PESO

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NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Director of the Dolores Olmedo Museum. This museum, also located in Xochimilco is worth visiting as it houses a superb collection of Diego Rivera's and Frida Kalho's paintings, as well as pre-Hispanic objects.