



Archaeological Rescue Reveals the Pre-Hispanic and Viceregal Past of the Old School of Jurisprudence

- Alongside the recently revealed serpent-head shaped sculpture, a Mexica building measuring 23 meters in length was identified.
- From the colonial era, bone remains, majolica and porcelain fragments, and a confessional carved into a wall of the Temple of Saint Catherine of Siena were discovered.

In the subsoil of Mexico City's Historic Center, inside the Old School of Jurisprudence, workers of the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH), have not only recovered a remarkable sculpture with a serpent-head shape, revealed in recent days, but also significant pre-Hispanic and viceregal vestiges that narrates the history of the country's capital.

The archaeological rescue project conducted by the Secretariat of Culture of Mexico's Government, through INAH, at the property of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), revealed the existence of a Mexica (Aztec) building, which estimated measures were 13.50 meters in width by 23.20 meters in length.

The remains of the building were located in the east wing —where the aforementioned polychromatic sculpture was found— and in the central courtyard. In the latter space, were identified a staircase with six steps, a plinth and an *alfarda* (an inclined ramp on the side of the stairs), which, thanks to the city's phreatic level, preserves its original stucco coating.

According to the archaeologist Moramay Estrada Vázquez, who coordinated the San Ildefonso 28 project, of the Archaeological Salvage Directorate (DSA) of INAH, the staircase is oriented to the north, hence it could have belonged to an access building to the Sacred Precinct of Tenochtitlan.

Based on the analysis of the floor sequence, experts have associated this recently discovered architecture with the fifth construction stage of Templo Mayor, corresponding to the years between the reigns of Axayácatl (1469-1481), Tízoc (1481-1486), and Ahuízotl (1486-1502).



It should be noted that, in addition to the reptile head, the archaeological rescue allowed the recovery of two other sculptures: a fragment of an anthropomorphic figure wearing a loincloth, which served as a standard-bearer, and also an architectural nail or spike shaped like a human skull.

Conventual Past

Alongside the pre-Hispanic elements, objects from the colonial era were preserved, such as majolica pots and shards, Chinese porcelain, and bones of pigs, cows, sheep, and domestic chickens, providing clues about the daily life of the Convent and Temple of Saint Catherine of Siena, whose construction history, in this section of the city, dates to 1594.

In the central courtyard of the UNAM building, a context with numerous male, female, juvenile, and even fetal bone remains was also found. According to physical anthropologist Elena Calderón Cuéllar, the abundance of bone elements and the fact that many were superimposed indicates that the area was used as a burial ground, both for the nuns belonging to the convent and for individuals unrelated to it.

In architectural matters, a 1.90-meter-high confessional was discovered, carved on one of the walls of the viceregal temple, between the 16th and 17th centuries, which remained in use until the 19th century, as denoted by the releveling of its floor over time; the aforementioned pre-Hispanic sculpture in the shape of a snake, which preserves traces of color and floral motifs; a decorative finish that begins in the face of a cherub and unfolds in the shape of a seashell, which managed to preserve the cavities that allowed the nuns to receive the sacrament of confession in their cloistered life.

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