MONTE ALBÁN

Oaxaca



BRIEF HISTORICAL REVIEW

*Monte Albán, the ancient capital of the Zapotecs and the first city in the **Highlands of Oaxaca**, was founded approximately in 500 BC by the people who lived in the Valley of Oaxaca. It occupied 6.5 square kilometers (approximately 2.5 square miles) and had a population of 25,000 people. Monte Albán is believed to have its downfall between 800 and 850 AD, possibly due to a drought.*

It was a center of trade, a great political unit that incorporated other communities in the valley, and a place of religious invocation, that can be noticed through the gods, especially Cocijo, God of Lightning and Rain, its effigy often depicted in vessels or "urns".

*The engraved intels of Monte Albán, the Danzantes (the Dancers), the Conquest Headstones and the stelae of the rulers, all show the symbols of **Zapotec writing**.*

***Monumental** architecture provided structure for activities such as commercial exchange in the main square, and religious celebrations in temples, whereas **vernacular** architecture was fully expressed in the square-shaped residences with central courtyard, which are divided into three categories, corresponding to three house sizes, and in the contrast between simple burials in graves and those for the elite in erected tombs.*

The city had a complex development from its foundation to its consolidation. Especially in its relations with Teotihuacán, with the establishment of the Barrio Zapoteco (Zapotec Neighborhood) in said metropolis, the invasion of Monte Albán by the Teotihuacan's and lastly the ultimate resurgence of Monte Albán and its final collapse.

TOPONYM	Pre-Columbian name unknown; possibly "Cerro del Jaguar" ("Hill of the Jaguar")
CULTURE	Zapotec
PERIOD	Late Preclassic and Classic (minor occupation in the Postclassic)
TIMESPAN	500 BC - 850 AD (850-1521 AD)

GETTING THERE

The archaeological site is located 8 kilometers (approximately 4.9 miles) west of the city of Oaxaca de Juárez.

OPENING HOURS

Monday to Sunday, from 8am to 5pm.

ADMISSION

The cost of admission is the one established by the Federal Law of Rights. Free admission for children under 13 years of age, students and teachers with valid credential, senior citizens, retirees, pensioners, disabled, as well as workers and researchers of the INAH.

PHOTOGRAPHY

For the use of any recording device there is a fee authorized by the Ministry of Finance. The taking of non-professional photographs, without a tripod, has no cost.

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CULTURA
SECRETARÍA DE CULTURA

INAH



Double Scapular

It is a genuinely Zapotec arquitectural element, similar to the boards found in Teotihuacan, but open from below, with panels in two planes and a panel (scapular) hanging from the main frame.

Atzompa

The Monte Alban headquarters were moved temporarily (550-700 AD), to the Atzompa complex, 5 kilometers northeast of Monte Albán, were its governor at the time ordered the construction of a great palace and its ball game courts; another similar yet smaller complex, possibly for his son or his brother, and a great TPA (temple-patio-altar) at the top of the highest hill.



DISCOVER IT YOURSELF

Stelae 12 and 13

They were part of the Wall of the Dancers and are among the oldest examples of Zapotec writing.

Monte Albán is in the middle of the Valley of Oaxaca and because of its height it offers a panoramic view of the valley; which in turn allowed its inhabitants to dominate the land and protect themselves from incursions.

Stela 1

It depicts the ruler 13 Búho (13 Owl) sitting with his ruling staff. It was found in the northeast corner of the South Platform (the original is located in the site museum).

OUTSTANDING STRUCTURE

The North Platform is the most important structure: it sometimes functioned as the headquarters of the rulers and was briefly occupied by the Teotihuacans, who established a mica workshop there. It includes two main religious enclosures, the Sunken Patio and the Conjunto del Vértice Geodésico (Geodesic Vertex Group; four temples around a courtyard), and it had the great stele, VG-2 stone, that depicts a woman ruler of the city.

ARCHITECTURE

There are five structures that show the singular characteristics of its stone carved architecture, of which only the foundations remain:

- *Residences with a square ground floor, central patio and narrow entrance.*
- *The tomb, which is an underground box that served to bury the main adult members of the family.*
- *The altar, small square shaped structure of low height, used to make sacrifices during religious ceremonies.*
- *The temple, usually one or two rectangular rooms with an entrance on its wider side; frequently placed on a high platform with staircase access.*
- *Ballcourt, consisting of an I-shaped court, central walls in a slope shape and niches in opposite corners.*

WHERE CAN I SEE THE TREASURES OF TOMB 7 OF MONTE ALBÁN?

The artifacts are displayed in the Museo de las Culturas, in the city of Oaxaca.





MUST-SEE

- A *Stelaes 12 and 13*
- B *Stela 1*
- C *The North Platform*
- D *Conquest Headstones (building L)*
- E *Lápidas de la Conquista (building J)*

1 South Platform
2 East Palace
3 Shrine
4 Main Square
5 Ballcourt
6 Sunken Patio
7 Residence of Tumb 104
8 Residence of Tumb 103
9 Residence of Tumb 7
10 Small ballcourt
11 Residence of Tumb 105

DID YOU KNOW...?

- *The protected area that surrounds the Monte Albán polygon covers almost 22 kilometers (approximately 13.67 miles) and includes the three hills of Monte Albán, El Gallo and Atzompa.*
- *The Dancers Wall and J Building were built out of large monoliths, just like the wall with ball players in Dainzu.*
- *Around 200 AD, a group of families, possibly from Monte Albán, established the Zapotec Neighborhood, on the west side of Teotihuacan, 3 kilometers west of the Calzada de los Muertos. Initially the relations were peaceful between the inhabitants of the two cities, but around 350 AD the Teotihuacans conquered Monte Albán and settled on the North Platform.*
- *Tomb Palace 105, on the eastern side of the access road, was a residence for the elite, possibly occupied by the last ruler of Monte Albán.*
- *Tomb 7 is among the most well-known archaeological findings in Mexico. It was built and used during the Classic period. Centuries later, a royal family, perhaps of Zapotec and Mixtec ancestry, reused it and hid within it their family treasures (gold, jewels, engraved bones).*
- *In the Postclassic period, after the fall of Monte Albán, a large circular wall was built in the area of the South Platform that was used as a fortress by people living at the bottom of the valley, perhaps in what is now Xococotlán.*

YOU CAN'T MISS...

- The Centro de las Artes de San Agustín Etla, half an hour from the city of Oaxaca, will captivate you with its original spaces, textile dyeing and design workshops, and photographic center. You can even learn how to make paper.
- The gastronomy of Oaxaca is extraordinary. Have a cup of atole with piloncillo in the market of La Merced; go on to the Centro Histórico and look for plantain molotes, roasted corn mole, baked cochito tacos; everything accompanied by some mezcal, the main beverage of the region.



SOME KEY NUMBERS

18 — The 18 excavations carried out by Alfonso Caso and Jorge R. Acosta defined Monte Albán as the great center of the old Zapotec culture, turning it into a tourist attraction.

1300 — For 1,300 years it had a prosperous life as a city and since its foundation it has been revered as a place for the ancestors.

500 — About 500 simple human burials and 260 tombs have been recorded.

7.5 — The Main Square covers approximately 7.5 hectares (approximately 18.5 acres).

2073 — The surface has 2,073 terraces, mostly for living purposes.

3.598 — The gold objects found in Tomb 7 weigh 3,598 kilograms (approximately 7,932 pounds).