Incense Burner (incensario) Lid
Teotihuacán

Central Highlands, Mexico, 150–650 AD
Ceramic, Overall: 20 x 17 1/8 x 10 1/4 in. (50.8 x 43.5 x 26 cm)

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Burning incense was central to the religious rituals of most Mesoamerican cultures. It was used in ceremonies of divination, ancestor worship, and veneration of the gods. The smoke also mimicked clouds which brought rain and agricultural abundance.

Incense burners from Teotihuacan are among the most elaborate in Mesoamerica. They were used in funerary rites to honor ancestors. The incense burner lid is decorated with a red painted face representing a stone mask. Stone masks were buried with mummy bundles, the wrapped remains of important deceased individuals. The appliqué decorations include butterflies, flowers, jade jewelry, and seashells, symbolizing the afterlife, war, water, and fertility. The smoke from burning incense escaped through the eyes of the red face and the mouth of the serpent on top.

Online Resources:
Hirsch Library Online Catalog
The Metropolitan Museum of Art Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Articles: (full-text access available on-site; off-site access available through your school library or Houston Public Library)

Print Resources:
The Teotihuacan Trinity
Mexico’s Indigenous Past
Art Treasures of Ancient Mexico
Mexico: From the Olmecs to the Aztecs
Religion, Art, and Iconography
Bibliography

Object Specific Information


General Surveys of Mesoamerican Art


Teotihuacán


Symbolism


Archaeology and Anthropology of Central Mexico


Pre-Columbian Art


Mesoamerican History


While some Internet resources are not appropriate for scholarly research, the websites recommended above are produced by known authorities in the field of Mesoamerican archaeology. It is always advisable to examine all sources carefully.

This reference guide is just the tip of the iceberg on helpful resources in the library’s holdings. Many of the suggested resources above have their own bibliographies. Each of these may lead you to another resource that would also be helpful in your research here in the museum or in another library. To find additional resources, use keywords such as “Teotihuacan”, “Mesoamerica”, and “pottery” in the online catalog and in periodical indexes. Once you find a few relevant titles, pay attention to the subject headings to identify similar materials. Examples of useful subject headings are:

- Teotihuacan Site (San Juan Teotihuacan, Mexico)
- Indian sculpture--Mexico
- Archaeology--Mexico
- Mexico--Antiquities--Exhibitions
- Indians of Mexico--Religion

For guidelines about writing it may be helpful to look at Sylvan Barnet’s A Short Guide to Writing about Art, which includes tips for looking, reading, and writing about art. Ask for it at the reference desk. At every stage of your work, please allow the library staff to help you. Contact us at 713-639-7325 or hirsch@mfah.org