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**MFA**  *The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston*  
 Hirsch Library Research Guide



**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)

Museum purchase funded by Brown Foundation Accessions Endowment Fund

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 appliquéd 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](#)

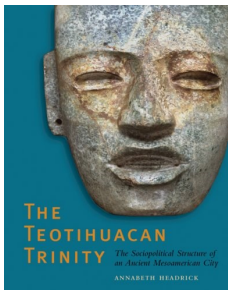
**Articles:** (full-text access available on-site; off-site access available through your school library or Houston Public Library)

[Kubler, George. "The Iconography of the Art of Teotihuacán." \*Studies in Pre-Columbian Art and Archaeology\*, no. 4 \(1967\): 1-40.](#)

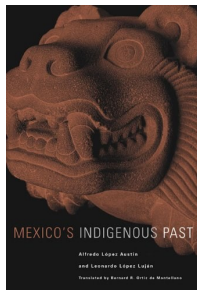
[Young-Sánchez, Margaret. "Veneration of the Dead: Religious Ritual on a Pre-Columbian Mirror-Back." \*The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art\* 77, no. 9 \(1990\): 326-351.](#)

[Ball, Joseph W. and Jennifer T. Taschek. "Sometimes a 'Stove' is 'Just a Stove': A Context-Based Reconsideration of Three-Prong 'Incense Burners' from the Western Belize Valley." \*Latin American Antiquity\* 18, no. 4 \(2007\): 451-470.](#)

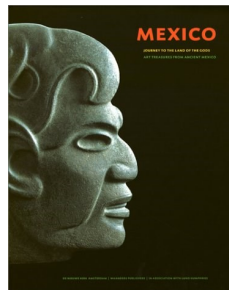
**Print Resources:**



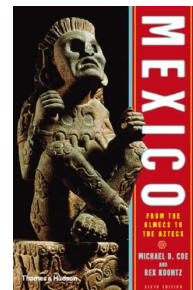
[The Teotihuacan Trinity](#)



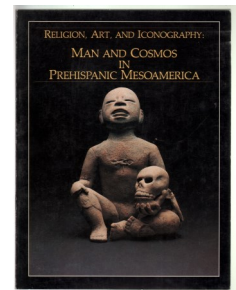
[Mexico's Indigenous Past](#)



[Art Treasures of Ancient Mexico](#)



[Mexico: From the Olmecs to the Aztecs](#)



[Religion, Art, and Iconography](#)

## Bibliography

### Object Specific Information

[Landay, Janet, and Thomas T. DuBrock. \*The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Visitor Guide\*. London: Scala, 2000.](#)  
N 576 .H7 A85 2000 Ref.

### General Surveys of Mesoamerican Art

[Gardner, Helen, Fred S. Kleiner, and Christin J. Mamiya. \*Gardner's Art through the Ages\*. 12th ed. Belmont: Thomson/Wadsworth, 2005.](#)  
N 5300 .G25 2005 Ref.

[Honour, Hugh, and John Fleming. \*The Visual Arts: A History\*. 5th ed. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1999.](#)  
N 5300 .H68 1999

[Stokstad, Marilyn, and David A. Brinkley. \*Art History\*. 3rd ed. Upper Saddle River: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2008.](#)  
N 5300 .S923 2008 Ref.

### Teotihuacán

[Berrin, Kathleen, and Ester Pasztory. \*Teotihuacan: Art from the City of the Gods\*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993.](#)  
F 1219.1 .T27 T463 1993 Reserve

[Coe, Michael D., Elizabeth P. Benson, and Dean R. Snow. \*Atlas of Ancient America\*. New York: Facts on File, 1986.](#)  
E 61 .C66 1986 Reserve

[Meyer, Karl. \*Teotihuacán\*. New York: Newsweek, 1973.](#) F 1219 .M756 1973

### Symbolism

[Chevalier, Jean. \*A Dictionary of Symbols\*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1994.](#) AZ 108 .C413 1994 Ref.

[Miller, Mary, and Karl A. Taube. \*The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya: An Illustrated Dictionary of Mesoamerican Religion\*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 1993.](#) F 1219.3 .R38 M5 1993

### Archaeology and Anthropology of Central Mexico

[Evens, Susan T. \*Ancient Mexico & Central America: Archaeology and Culture History\*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004.](#)  
F 1219 .E92 2004

[Weaver, Muriel P. \*The Aztecs, Maya, and their Predecessors: Archaeology of Mesoamerica\*. New York: Academic Press, 1981.](#)  
F 1219 .W42 1981

### Pre-Columbian Art

[Emmerich, André, and Lee Boltin. \*Art Before Columbus: The Art of Ancient Mexico, From the Archaic Villages of the Second Millennium B.C. to the Splendor of the Aztecs\*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963.](#) F 1219.3 .A7 E48

[Highwater, Jamake. \*Arts of the Indian Americas: Leaves from the Sacred Tree\*. New York: Harper & Row, 1983.](#) E 59 .A73 H53 1983

[Lehmann, Henry. \*Pre-Columbian Ceramics\*. New York: Viking Press, 1962.](#) E59 .P8 L43 1962

[Paz, Octavio. \*Ritual Arts of the New World: Pre-Columbian America\*. Milano: Skira, 2000.](#) F 1219.3 .A7 M85713 2000

[Townsend, Richard F., and Anthony F. Areni. \*The Ancient Americas: Art from Sacred Landscapes\*. Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 1992.](#)  
E 59 .A7 A42 1992

### Mesoamerican History

[Carrasco, David. \*The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures: The Civilizations of Mexico and Central America\*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.](#) F 1218.6 .O95 2001 Ref.

[López Austin, Alfredo, and Leonardo López Luján. \*Mexico's Indigenous Past\*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001.](#)  
F 1219 .L85813 2001

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](mailto:hirsch@mfah.org)