

Document A: Maya Vessel

This ceramic vessel was made by an artist in the Maya lowlands around 600-900 CE. The Maya lowlands are located in the northern part of present-day Guatemala, about 700 miles southeast of Teotihuacan.



Professor Marc Zender, an anthropologist who studies classic Maya society, said the following about this vessel:

The central **icon** is a large bird, with feather fans and other **icons** that indicate that it's an **import** from central Mexico, from the great city of Teotihuacan. . . . When we roll out this image, we see not only this great foreign bird but also . . . foreign snakes. This was . . . the Maya's attempt to use their own writing and art to come to terms with **elements** far outside of their own region.

Source: *Ceramic vessel by unknown Maya artist, 600-900 CE*

Vocabulary

icon: symbol

import: something brought from a foreign place

elements: members of a group

Document B: Maya Monuments

Below are translations of writings that come from some Maya monuments created 379-504 CE in the classic Maya cities of Tikal and Uaxactún. The writings were translated by David Stuart, a professor of archaeology at the University of Texas at Austin, who studies classic Maya society. After reading the Maya writings, you will then read David Stuart's ideas about what these monument writings mean.

In 374 CE, Spearthrower Owl became king of an unnamed place.

Someone named Siyah K'ak' arrived in the Maya city of Tikal on January 14, 378 CE, with the approval of Spearthrower Owl.

Siyah K'ak' came from the west.

On the very same day of Siyah K'ak's arrival, the Tikal ruler Jaguar Paw died.

Within a year of Siyah K'ak's arrival in Tikal, Spearthrower Owl's son Nun Yax Ayin became the ruler of Tikal instead of Jaguar Paw's son. *[A picture of Nun Yax Ayin is carved in the style of Teotihuacan art, not in the usual Maya style.]*

Source: *Unknown Maya authors, monuments from classic Maya cities of Tikal and Uaxactún, created 379-504 CE, translated by David Stuart*

David Stuart's ideas about what the monuments' writing means:

I conclude that Siyah K'ak' was a foreigner and may have started Teotihuacan's presence in Tikal. I would speculate that Siyah K'ak' was the leader of a military force that overthrew Tikal's dynasty in 378 CE, killing the ruler Jaguar Paw and installing a new ruler, Nun Yax Ayin, in his place.

Document C: Aztec Encyclopedia

The Florentine Codex is an encyclopedia of Aztec history and culture. It was first drafted around 1555 in Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital.

The Spanish priest Bernardino de Sahagún was in charge of the project to make the encyclopedia. He wanted to write a detailed record of Aztec culture. With some of his former students, who were Aztec men, Sahagún took down the statements of Aztec elders, and his students drafted the books in the Aztec language.

Book 3, Chapter 1

How and where the gods began is not well known. But this is clear: at Teotihuacan, long ago, when there was still darkness, all the gods gathered together and debated who would become the sun. . . . Then all the gods died so that the sun might come into being.

Book 10, Chapter 29

Long ago, the Aztecs moved from the northern desert lands to the Valley of Mexico. Behold the story which the ancients told. On their long journey, the Aztecs made offerings at a place named Teotihuacan. There they raised pyramids for the sun and for the moon. Then they made many small pyramids, where offerings were made.

At Teotihuacan, their leaders were elected. And when the rulers died, the Aztecs buried them there and built a pyramid over them. The pyramids now stand like small mountains, though they were made by hand.

And so they named it Teotihuacan, because it was the burial place for the rulers. For so it was said: "When we die, it is not true that we die, for still we live. We are resurrected. We awaken." . . .

Thus, the ancients said, the ruler who died became a god . . . so that those who were rulers would be obeyed. All were worshipped as gods when they died; some became the sun, some the moon, etc.

Source: Florentine Codex, first drafted around 1555 by Bernardino de Sahagún and his research assistants.

Teotihuacan Guiding Questions

Document A: Maya Vessel

1. (Sourcing) Who made this vessel?
2. (Sourcing) When was this vessel made?
3. (Sourcing) Where was this vessel made?
4. (Sourcing) Why might this vessel be a reliable source for learning about Teotihuacan's influence on classic Maya society?
5. (Sourcing) Who is Marc Zender? Do you think he is a reliable source for learning about this vessel? Explain.
6. Based on this vessel, what can we say about the influence that Teotihuacan had on classic Maya society?
7. What is one question this vessel does not answer about the influence that Teotihuacan had on classic Maya society?

Document B: Maya Monuments

1. (Sourcing) Who wrote the texts of these monuments?
2. (Sourcing) When were these monuments made?
3. (Sourcing) Where were these monuments made?
4. (Sourcing) Why might these writings be reliable sources for learning about Teotihuacan's influence on classic Maya society?
5. (Close reading) The writings state that "Siyak K'ak' came from the west." Which direction was Teotihuacan from Tikal?
6. (Close reading) The picture of Nun Yax Ayin, the new king of Tikal, was carved in the style of Teotihuacan art, not the usual Maya style. Why might the artist have portrayed a Maya leader in a style from another society? What could this mean about Teotihuacan's influence on classic Maya society?
7. Based on these writings, is there anything we can say for sure about the influence that Teotihuacan had on classic Maya society? Explain.
8. (Sourcing) Who is David Stuart? Do you think he is a reliable source for learning about these monuments? Explain.
9. (Close reading) Many scholars disagree about what these writings mean. What does David Stuart believe they mean?

Document C: Aztec Encyclopedia

1. (Sourcing) Who wrote the Florentine Codex?
2. (Sourcing) When it written?
3. (Sourcing) Where was it written?
4. (Sourcing) Why might the Florentine Codex be a reliable source for learning about Teotihuacan's influence on Aztec society?
5. (Close reading) Where did the Aztecs believe the sun was created?
6. (Close reading) According to this document, who built the pyramids at Teotihuacan?
7. Scholars agree that the Aztecs were not the group of people who built the pyramids of Teotihuacan. The Aztecs did not even arrive in the Valley of Mexico until the 1200s, long after the collapse of Teotihuacan. But the Aztecs did become the most powerful group in the Valley of Mexico in the 1400s. Why do you think the Aztecs might have claimed that their ancestors built the pyramids of Teotihuacan?
8. Based on these passages, what can we say about the influence that Teotihuacan had on Aztec society?