

The Moon's Vagina & the First Guano Lords: Fertilizer and Fertility in Premodern Peru

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This vividly illustrated presentation will investigate the importance of the marine environment in ancient and early colonial Peru. Guano, a phosphate-rich deposit of sea bird excrements found chiefly on island along the coast of South America was one of the first globalized sources of fertilizer. Its history is closely interwoven with the advent of modern, industrialized agriculture. Less known is the premodern history of Guano a history of significance to the places it came from. From three mutually reinforcing lines of evidence, a fascinating story of interpenetration between cultural and natural systems can be told. It could be established that the white, disk-like guano bird nests were known as quillairaca, 'silver vaginas of the moon' and represented the sites where both avian and human lineages were reborn, both in a literal sense (as nests and agricultural fertilizer) and a genealogical sense, since both coastal peoples and the guano birds shared the same

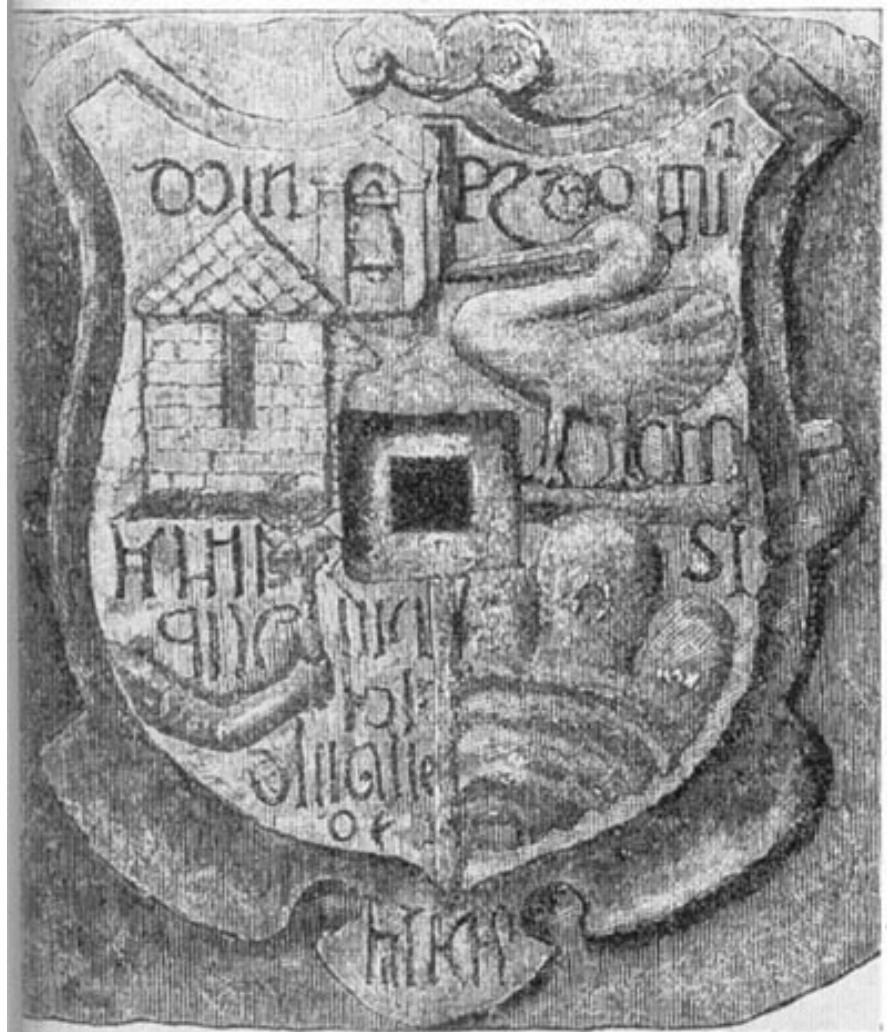


FIG. 16. The Bollaert Slab.

mythic mother, Urpay Huachac "she who gives birth to birds." The environmental history of Guano has been told as one of physical exploitation so far. We are only beginning to understand the cultural significance of this story and the disruption of local culture-nature complexes through globalized Guano trade bit by bit.

Time: Monday, October 8, 2007, 18-20h

Place: IFF, 1070 Wien, Schottenfeldgasse 29, seminar room 6