

11-1-2009

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### Recommended Citation

Nieves, Ana (2009) "More than Meets the Eye: A Study of Two Nasca Motifs," *Andean Past*: Vol. 9 , Article 13.

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## MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE: A STUDY OF TWO NASCA MOTIFS

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### INTRODUCTION

Studies of Nasca art (100 B.C.-A.D. 750) have largely focused on the slip-painted fine-ware of this civilization. It is generally accepted that these polychrome vessels are carriers of religious ideology. The analysis of this culture's art has included the identification and definition of descriptive types (e.g.: Proulx 2006; Roark 1965; Seler 1961) as well as iconographic studies based on comparative archaeological data (Carmichael 1992) or on ethnographic analogies (Proulx 2001).<sup>1</sup> Through these approaches, the importance of agriculture and fertility and the association of death imagery with agricultural abundance has been well documented.

In this study I focus primarily on the eye-shaped navel on the Anthropomorphic Mythical Being as it is depicted in Phases 3, 4, and 5 of the Nasca sequence, and on a related arrangement I am calling the Corn Configuration. I propose that the eye motif is a sign that refers to sprouting potential and seed-like qualities. Through an analysis of substitution and abbreviation patterns, I demonstrate that the meaning of this eye-shaped sign is applicable to different figure types, so that it is not an exclusive trait of the Anthropomorphic Mythical Being, but carries this meaning regardless of where it is depicted. Nasca artists used the eye sign as an indicator of plant forms (phytomorphs). This identification is in agreement with what we know about Nasca mythical iconography, due to the clear association between many mythical

beings and agriculture (see Carmichael 1992, 1994; Proulx 1989). However, thus far iconographic studies have relied only on iconic<sup>2</sup> representations of plants, fruits, and vegetables as signifiers of agricultural abundance, failing to acknowledge the possibility of a more complex metaphoric strategy involving signifiers that do not resemble the signified.

### WHOLENESS AND FRAGMENTATION

Before embarking on an analysis of the eye-shaped navel on the Anthropomorphic Mythical Being and the Corn Configuration, it is important to address the relationship between Nasca painted representations *per se* and the objects on which they are depicted, because this affects how viewers experience Nasca art in general. The relationship between painted images and the ceramic vessels that support them has been largely omitted from studies and interpretations of Nasca iconography. The main reason for this oversight is possibly that iconographers rely on line drawings for the analysis of Nasca images (for example, Figures 1a, 1b, 8-12). In part this is due to the easier reproduction of line drawings (*vis-à-vis* photographs) in publications as well as the "readability" of the figures as a whole, with all their identifying attributes.

The main problem with using such drawings is that information is invariably lost. Rollout drawings, in particular, disregard the three dimensionality of the vase and the relationship

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<sup>1</sup> The history of the research of Nasca art has been thoroughly summarized by Silverman and Proulx (2002).

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<sup>2</sup> I am using the term "iconic" in its most traditional and basic definition in art historical writing, which is to equate the term with the naturalistic representation of an object.

of the painted figures to the shape of the vessel. For example, there are Nasca bowls that depict fish in their interiors, as if one were looking into containers full of water while fish swim inside them (Proulx 2006:150-151). The artists who painted these bowls took the experience of the viewer looking at them into account, but this is lost in a line drawing of the same fish motif. In a similar vein, one could argue that the relationship between the painted image and the shape of the vessel also adds a level of complexity to the representation of Nasca mythical beings,<sup>3</sup> which is also lost in line drawings.

A recurring figure in Nasca iconography, the Anthropomorphic Mythical Being (Figures 1-4), is a masked creature that has received many names in various publications. Henceforth I am simply referring to this being as AMB, because this is the abbreviation used in Proulx's *Sourcebook of Nasca Ceramic Iconography* (Proulx 2006). The AMB is always depicted with a mouth-mask and a headdress, round ear ornaments, and a necklace.<sup>4</sup> It is often shown holding or carrying trophy heads and/or holding a club. The AMB often wraps around the exterior of vessels. When this is the case, its entire body is not visible at once. Because of the practicality of the rollout drawing in describing the main traits in the iconography, we have grown accustomed to seeing the entire body simultaneously, as a whole (Figures 1a and 1b), but this is rarely the experience of the viewer when holding an actual object. To view the entire AMB, the viewer must rotate the vessel (Figures 2-4). As one portion of its body is visible, others are hidden. One could, therefore, see the very identifiable face of the AMB (Figures 2a, 3a,

and 4a), but not the objects on its body. Conversely, one could also see the torso and a portion of the figure's streamer or extension (Figures 2b, 3b, and 4b) without a clear view of the head. In Figure 3b, for example, the image simply appears to consist of a series of horizontal bands with other motifs on them. The main figure is not immediately apparent and could even be overlooked by an uninformed viewer. However, the smaller motifs on its body are easy to read and immediately identifiable (heads, banded layer, single eye). From this side it is impossible to tell that the eye is the navel of the main figure, but its central location makes this motif stand out. This is a sharp contrast from rollout line drawings of this motif where the eye gets lost as a "secondary" motif within the larger body of this being. In rollout drawings (Figure 1a) the eye lacks the emphasis it has when the body of the AMB wraps around a vessel. The result of this obstruction is, to some degree, a fragmentation of the body of the AMB, where seemingly "secondary" motifs dominate the composition, at least when seen from one side. Fragmentation allows the "secondary" motif to exist on its own, becoming the focal point of one side of the vessel (Figures 2b and 3b). From this viewpoint, the wholeness of the AMB's body seems irrelevant, as the focal point has shifted to this eye-shaped motif.

In her study of Paracas Necropolis embroideries, Dwyer (1979) discussed a similar situation where principal figures and "secondary" figures compete for the viewer's attention in Early Intermediate Period 2 (EIP 2) embroidered motifs. According to Dwyer:

There may be such a multiplication of secondary forms that the main figure itself is difficult to discern. . . In some cases, the principal figure seems to be merely a vehicle for carrying these multiple motifs, and is constructed merely by the juxtaposition of many secondary thematic elements. In

<sup>3</sup> In studies of Nasca art the term "mythical beings" refers to elaborate creatures that combine a number of elements such as a necklace, mouth-mask and a forehead ornament (Silverman and Proulx 2002:137).

<sup>4</sup> Donald Proulx (2006:62-79) outlined the variations in which this being appears in Nasca art.

other cases, a secondary figure may have such significance for the design that it is greatly enlarged and has secondary figures of its own. Since the secondary elements seem to carry a substantial part of the design's meaning, the artist's focus was upon rendering each of them as carefully and as clearly as possible (*ibid.*: 121).

The aesthetic described by Dwyer in EIP 2 embroideries is the same as that of Nasca slip-painted pottery representations described above. The fact that the main figure wraps around the vessel and that visibility of the figure is partially obstructed adds some importance to the "secondary" motifs on this being. The eye-shaped navel, often assumed to be a "secondary" motif, is the focal point of the composition on one side of the vessel.

The fragmentation of the AMB through the partial obstruction of its body, as described above, occurs primarily in Phase 3 (e.g. Proulx 1968: plate 1a), Phase 4 (e.g. Proulx 1968: plate 2b), and Phase 5 (Figures 2-4) of the Nasca sequence. During Phase 5, it coexists with another type of fragmentation, best explained as a *pars pro toto* representation of some mythical beings (e.g. the Bloody Mouth motif as a representation of an abbreviated Mythical Killer Whale motif). In Nasca 5 *pars pro toto* representations, the wholeness of the mythical being is not relevant, and only portions of this being become the focal point. It can be argued that fragmentation of Nasca mythical beings also occurs in late Nasca phases, where the repetition of "secondary" motifs cause the virtual dissolution of the main figure's body.

Catherine Allen (1981) attempted to work with this particular characteristic of Nasca art by applying a linguistic approach to the imagery. Allen described Nasca art as:

a complex and highly structured iconographic system. In other words, one may recognize a finite set of design motifs, which are interrelated according to recognizable combinatorial rules (Allen 1981: 44).<sup>5</sup>

She admitted that there are limitations in the study of Nasca art, however, because the referents for many of the Nasca figures may not be obvious to the audience. According to Allen:

in Nasca iconography we have access to the syntactic dimension of a semiotic system; we have very limited access to the semantic dimension; and the pragmatic dimension is closed to us (Allen 1981:46).

In her analysis of the structure of Nasca signs, Allen nevertheless defined some motifs as major motifs and others as "secondary". In this structure:

subsidiary elements have a kind of adjectival function, apparently 'modifying,' or providing information about, the major motifs (Allen 1981:47).

She focused on how two of these motifs, the mouth-mask and the trophy head, were used within the larger figures, arguing for the employment of visual metonymy in Nasca art. Allen's study is innovative in her attempt to draw attention to these motifs, and in proposing a methodology that would elucidate the internal

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<sup>5</sup> Recent evidence suggests that Nasca polychrome ceramics were manufactured in restricted locations during the early Nasca phases. These wares were likely to have been manufactured at Cahuachi and redistributed to other locations (Vaughn and Neff 2000; Vaughn *et al.* 2006). Religious specialists, according to Vaughn and Neff (2000), were active in pottery manufacture. If this is the case, then the consistency and regularity in Nasca iconography could be explained by its centralized production and limited number of artists/priests involved in the creation of these vessels.

logic of Nasca images. The approach to be demonstrated here is closely related to Allen's approach, because it also involves the analysis of the internal structure of Nasca imagery and demonstrates a metonymic relationship between signs. I also focus on the internal relationship between signs (the combinatory rules), because this structure sheds light on associations that Nasca artists themselves made. However, I push Allen's ideas even further and argue for the existence of recurring Nasca symbols in which the signifier does not resemble the signified. Even when plants or vegetables are not represented in a naturalistic manner alongside Nasca mythical beings, the simple addition of these subtle signs would have served to evoke the ideas of vegetation and plants to the initiated audience. The fragmentation that occurs when the larger figures wrap around vessels allows these signs to be viewed independently from these mythical beings. Because these signs carry their own meanings and associations, they not only can exist as independent symbols, but their meaning is also transferable to other beings.

### THE EYE-SHAPED SEED MARKER

There have been various hypotheses proposed to explain the significance of the AMB in Nasca art. The AMB is also known by other names, depending on the interpretations supported by each scholar. María Rostworowski (1992), for example, identified the AMB as the god Con, a coastal deity who turned the coast into a desert. This god is described as having no bones and having the ability to move swiftly across large distances and perhaps even fly (*ibid.*: 21). The characteristics that lead Rostworowski to associate the AMB with Con include the fact that the AMB sometimes looks as if it is flying, with its body extended horizontally, as well as the occasional representation of the AMB with wings. Based in part on the same traits, Ralph Cané (1985) argued that this figure represents a shaman in flight. Other scholars preferred a less

specific term to refer to this being. Proulx's (1968, 2006) name for this being, the Anthropomorphic Mythical Being, emphasizes the human qualities of its body. Roark (1965) also argued that the earlier versions of this being represented masked men, while later versions depicted supernatural beings. According to Roark, although other mythical beings are composite creatures, this being's body is purely "human" (*ibid.*: 17).<sup>6</sup> This stands in direct opposition to Seler's (1961 [1923]) identification of this figure as a Cat Demon due to the shape of its mask that resembles whiskers. However, because of the occasional depictions of this being holding or carrying plants, Seler also refers to it as a Vegetation Demon, one of the "Bringers of Foodstuffs" (*ibid.*: 206). Proulx separated the AMB into types, based in part on the "signifier" or streamer attached to each AMB. Although most were associated with animals, there is one type of AMB that clearly includes a plant "signifier". I support the idea that the AMB is a composite creature, and that one of its primary non-anthropomorphic traits is that of a seed or plant. However, I argue that this figure could still represent a plant or seed even when plants are not naturalistically represented. A close inspection of the motifs that are associated with the AMB will substantiate this proposition.

Although the relationship of the AMB to agriculture is visible in its association with the sprouting head motif that is occasionally shown on the AMB's back (Figures 1a, 1b, and 4b), a recurring symbol which is by far more subtle gives this figure phytomorphic qualities that are present even when other plants or vegetables are not. This trait, which appears very often on the torso of the AMB, is the eye-shaped navel. The navel is not usually represented on the

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<sup>6</sup> According to this author, the "signifier" (streamer that is attached to the back of the AMB) is the only portion of this creature that has any non-anthropomorphic characteristics.

standing AMBs but on the depictions of this being in an extended pose, belonging to Phases 3 (e.g. Proulx 1968: plate 1a), 4 (e.g. *ibid.*: plate 2b), and 5 (Figures 2-4). It is rare to find the eye-shaped navel among winged AMBs, but it is present in some of such representations. When present, the eye-shaped navel is usually large enough to be immediately identified by the viewer.

The identification of the navel as an eye is made here based on its appearance. It is usually lens shaped, although there are examples of circular eye-shaped navels. The interior of this shape is always white, outlined with a dark contour, and has a dark dot (pupil) in the center. When this eye-shape navel is lens shaped, the pointed ends are aligned to one of the dark stripes that run along the torso of the AMB. Although there are several ways that Nasca artists represented eyes, especially to differentiate between the eyes of trophy heads and those of mythical beings, there is a connection made by Nasca artists between the AMB's own eyes and its eye-shaped navel as they usually have the same shape within a single cup (see Figures 1a, 2, and 4, for example). Few scholars have mentioned the eye-shaped navel or speculated on its significance. Seler (1961: 191) described it as an eye or a hole. Roark simply points out that the navel is "drawn in the same manner as the eyes" (Roark 1965:22) but does not give any reason for this association.

Although at first this motif seems peculiar, the significance of this type of marking is evident if one considers the many representations of seeds in Nasca art (Figures 5 and 6). These motifs, which have been labeled as beans, are usually depicted in the shape of a drop with a pointed end. According to Proulx:

[these] are always drawn in multiples, with one end of the seed pointed and the opposite end somewhat larger and more round-

ed. The oval-shaped scar or hilum, where the seed was originally attached to the pod, is clearly drawn on the edge of the bean (Proulx 2006:164).

The hilum is depicted as an outlined semicircular form around a dark spot. In fact, this resembles an eye with an eccentric or pendant pupil. The resemblance to an eye does not appear to be coincidental, because some beans are even represented with two hila (Figure 7), an impossibility in nature. Visually, however, the pairing of the hila makes this type of seed resemble a head.

These drop-shaped motifs are usually referred to as beans. However, I prefer to use the more generic term "seeds". The pointed end on these seeds shows that Nasca artists were not attempting a naturalistic depiction of a bean or a seed (beans do not have sharp points), but a very abstracted or stylized one.<sup>7</sup> Often, this point is emphasized by the addition of a line that separates this portion of the seed from the rounded lower portion. Sometimes the point is painted a different color than the rest of the seed, making this pointed form stand out even more (see Figures 6 and 7).

Evidence that the hilum marker on these seeds is shown as, or compared to, an eye can be found on Figure 8, which depicts an extended figure with a drop-shaped seed as part of its body. In this representation, the hilum is shown attached to a stem that takes the form of two serpents. More importantly, however, the hilum is executed exactly in the same way as the upturned eyes of the main figure.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore,

<sup>7</sup> These motifs are so abstracted that they have confused scholars such as Seler (1961), who identified them as dates.

<sup>8</sup> In Figure 8 the eye-shaped navel repeats the shape of the main figure's eyes as well as the eye shown on the breechcloth. It is likely that the breechcloth eye is another fertility reference due to its strategic placement on the genital area.

the eye-hilum is located in the middle of this figure's torso, where one would expect to find a navel. The hilum is the point of union between seed and plant, an important nexus crucial for the seed's ability to live and eventually germinate. Since the navel can also be seen as a point of attachment, its association with a hilum demonstrates a visual parallel between seeds and humans.

Iconographic evidence further supports the identification of the eye-shaped navel as a seed marker on the AMB specifically. On one example published by Seler (1961), shown on Figure 9, a very identifiable shape of a seed substitutes for the AMB's body. In this case the bean's hilum, done in the shape of an upturned eye, also coincides with the placement of the navel. The stripes on the bean echo the longitudinal bands on the torso of the AMB (Figures 1-4). In other words, Figure 9 shows the longhand version of the AMB's torso. In other representations of the AMB (such as those seen in Figures 1a and b), the eye-hilum marker, without the rest of the bean's shape, stands in for an abbreviated bean or seed. This is a clear example of visual synecdoche, a part (the hilum) standing for the whole (the seed). At the same time, by placing the eye-hilum on the AMB, the artists have symbolically charged this figure with agricultural references. This navel-eye is also a metaphor, because an eye does not naturalistically represent a navel or a seed.

In the example on Figure 1b, the eye-hilum relates another anthropomorphic being to a seed. In this image, the AMB holds a smaller anthropomorphic figure that is wearing neither clothing nor ornaments. It has a clear eye-shaped navel, however. This is a decapitated individual who also happens to be sprouting corn out of its neck and chili peppers from its fingertips. The eye-shaped navel not only ascribes the sprouting potential of a seed to the AMB, it also does this for the decapitated individual.

The eye-shaped navel is therefore a symbol that relates the Nasca AMB to a seed or, at the very least, attributes plant-like qualities to this being, even when other iconic representations of plants are not present. Another aspect of the AMB's iconography that supports this association between this figure and seeds or plants involves the depiction of mice that are often shown approaching the AMB or nibbling parts of its body (Figure 1b, for example). According to Proulx, rodents like these are most often depicted:

nibbling on corncobs with their large jaws. . . They are almost always painted black, on a white background. Rodents are never painted singularly; they always occur in multiples, in imitation of their natural proclivity to live in packs (Proulx 2006:144-145).

Undoubtedly the Nasca had observed the behavior of mice in agricultural fields and were familiar with the threats they posed. In his discussion of rodent imagery in Moche art, Steve Bourget stated that rodents:

represent probably the most dangerous pest for preindustrial agriculture. The reproductive cycle of rodents is very rapid; on average, the gestation period is about 20 days, and the female will give birth to up to 8 pups per litter. The pups reach maturity in 5 to 8 weeks. A single female may produce up to 56 offspring annually. Therefore, in optimal conditions, a single pair of rodents and their offspring may produce a population of more than 50 rodents in less than 120 days, a period corresponding to the average time needed for maize to reach maturity. . . A small population of rodents at the beginning of the agricultural season could thus literally, physically, and metaphorically outgrow the crops and de-

stroy everything long before harvest time (Bourget 2006:145-146).

These depictions of multiple rodents eating crops are, therefore, showing a rather dangerous scenario. Through the interchangeable representation of the mice eating corn-cobs and the AMB, Nasca artists have established a visual link between the AMB and the seeds within the corn-cob. However, I would argue that the juxtaposition of the AMB and the rodents is comparable to other juxtapositions of death and agricultural fertility imagery in Nasca art (e.g. Sprouting Heads and Harvester figures). The fertility of mice depends on the crop, but their abundance also threatens to destroy it, so life and death are again related concepts embodied in the AMB.

It is important to point out that even when plants are not naturalistically represented, the eye-shaped navel as seed marker is always a reminder of this AMB's plant-like qualities (see Proulx 1968: plate 2, 1989: plates xxvi-xxviii; Townsend 1985: figure 20; *inter alia*). Any attempt to categorize Nasca iconography should include this eye-shaped sign as a reference to agriculture and fertility,<sup>9</sup> even if the eye is not an iconic reference to plants in any way. However, this is not the only example in Nasca art in which a seemingly anthropomorphic figure also becomes phytomorphic through the incorporation of specific signs on its body. A related case

<sup>9</sup> A recently excavated Nasca 5 jar from La Tiza (Conlee 2007) depicts a plant emerging from the top of a trophy head. The plant has two eye-shaped signs on a striped surface, which Proulx correctly identified as the AMB's striped tunic (*ibid.*: 443). It is interesting to note that, in this particular example, the eye-shaped navel has been doubled. By having the eye appear twice, the sign is no longer read as a navel on a torso. In this case, it is clearly read as eyes on a plant. The addition of these eyes to the plant turns the plant into a living being, but their presence also reinforces the identification of this as a plant that can produce seeds and, therefore, the eyes refer to seeds, sprouting, and agricultural abundance.

involves the iconography of the Nasca Mythical Harvester.

## THE CORN CONFIGURATION

Harvesters are a common motif on Nasca vases. They stand frontally, wear a conical or pointed hat, and hold plants or "agricultural tools" in their hands. Roark (1965:26) described the Harvester figure (Figure 10) as a human, not a mythical, figure due to the absence of animal traits on its body, as well as the relatively small amount of ornament proliferation<sup>10</sup> seen with this figure. However, Patrick Carmichael (1994) argued that these are not simply depictions of people involved in agriculture, but are instead representations of the dead, closely associated with agricultural abundance and fertility. He based this association with death on the lines that often decorate the mouths of Harvester figures (resembling the spines which go through the lips of trophy heads), their upturned eyes (also part of trophy head representations), and the markings on their chests (which make these figures appear skeletal). According to Carmichael, these images portray the dead bringing the products of the harvest.

Proulx (1989:150) pointed out that there is a more elaborate type of Harvester that, besides having the conical hat and plants, also has a necklace that is associated with mythical creatures as well as a face that is "painted with spots" (*ibid.*: 150). He named this type of figure the Mythical Harvester (Figure 11). The Mythical Harvester differs from regular depictions of Harvesters. This figure's eyes are wide open, much like the eyes of the AMB. Its lips are not shown with spines, unlike those of regular Harvesters. Skeletal markings are not shown on its body either. These are the essential characteristics with which to relate this figure to

<sup>10</sup> Proliferation refers to the extensions, rays, volutes, and other motifs that radiate from figures in Nasca art beginning with Phase 5.



representations of the dead, as Carmichael did with other Harvester figures. At the same time, the Mythical Harvester's pointed hat, posture, and plants are definite indications that this figure is a more elaborate version of the Harvesters. Carmichael did not address the iconography of the Mythical Harvester in his study.

One of the most revealing versions of the Mythical Harvester, shown in Figure 11, is in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago. The image of this Mythical Harvester appears wrapped around the bottom of a cup. It wears the conical hat and a necklace, and holds plants of different types.<sup>11</sup> In this particular example of the Mythical Harvester, the artist has established a relationship between the figure and the corn-cobs that adorn its waist. Each corn-cob is marked with an X, which represents the leaves wrapped around the cob. Also in each corn-cob, individual kernels are depicted as circular shapes. The Mythical Harvester on this vase also has an X on its torso. The shape of its hat repeats the shape of the cob. Consistent with this figure's iconography, this Mythical Harvester's face is covered with round spots or dots. Although Proulx interprets these dots as facial paint "possibly representing decorations worn during harvest festivals" (Proulx 2006:93), I propose that the equation made between the shape of this Mythical Harvester and the shape of corn-cobs indicates that the dots on the face of the Mythical Harvester correspond to the dots on the corn-cob, *i.e.* the kernels. At least in part, Nasca artists represented the Mythical Harvester as an anthropomorphic corn-cob. Although there are several ways in which Nasca artists represented corn, this particular artist purposefully repeated the same traits on both the larger figure and the corn-cobs on its body. This combination of traits (the X marking, the

circular spots as corn kernels, and the pointed Harvester hat) constitutes what I am defining here as the Corn Configuration. At least one of these traits, along with the necklace, is always present on the Mythical Harvester, associating this figure with the shape of corn. Although there may be subtle changes in the different motifs shown on its body, variations of figure can still be cross-referenced with the Art Institute Mythical Harvester. This is the most widely reproduced example, although other versions have been published by Tello (1959: figure 105) and by Rickenbach (1999:341-342).

Interestingly, the X marking is not limited to representations of corn and Mythical Harvesters. Some beans or drop-shaped seeds are also decorated with an X (Proulx 2006: figure 5.231). Another motif that has the X marking is the kidney-shaped fruit (Proulx 2006:165-166). An Effigy Harvester in Figure 12 differs in some ways from the Art Institute example. This Harvester does not have the X or the conical hat, but it still displays dots on its face. It is also shown holding corn. Furthermore, its eyes are located within two depictions of corn-cobs. The artist has placed corn-cobs (which are full of seeds) over the eyes of the main figure, equating both. The juxtaposition of eyes and corn-cobs reinforces the eye-seed metaphor.

It is interesting to note as well that the pointed shape of the Harvester hat (Figures 10-12) parallels the pointed shape of a seed in Nasca art. Although speculative, I believe that further research may indicate a connection between this shape and the concept of fertility or potential for sprouting.

An example of the Effigy Harvester, published by Zuidema (Figure 13) shows this figure with corn-cobs around the eyes and the facial kernel markings. Below the streamers that emerge from its mouth, the artist reinforces the plant/seed symbolism through the inclusion of

<sup>11</sup> Unlike the images of the AMB, the Mythical Harvester is often assigned a specific sex by Nasca artists, because a penis is sometimes suggested by the inclusion of a fruit or plant in the pubic area (in this case, a chili pepper).

an eye-shaped navel marking. This is the only Mythical Harvester identified in the literature as a corn-related deity. Zuidema (1972:50) called this figure a Maize god due to the cobs around its eyes. However, the eye-shaped navel and the facial kernel markings also reinforce this figure's association with seeds and plants.

As was demonstrated with the eye-shaped seed marker, Nasca symbols do not necessarily resemble their referents. Therefore, other plants need not be shown for the Corn Configuration to symbolize agricultural fertility. A cup in the collection of the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos in Lima (Figure 14) is probably the best example of this. In this representation, the central figure, which wraps around the bottom of the cup, has a necklace and wears a pointed hat. Two figures cross to form an X over its face. These characteristics alone relate this central figure to the Corn Configuration. However, the shape of the hat and the X marking are not the only plant symbols here. Not only does the body of the figure also have an eye-shaped navel, but the two smaller figures that cross each other display seed markers. In fact, the artist makes a small visual pun with the seed marker, because the eyes of the larger figure are also the navels of the smaller figures. The crossed figures have even been provided with an extra navel so that the viewer associates one pair of eyes with the central figure and still sees a navel on each of the crossed figures. It is important to note that there are no other references to agriculture on this cup. No plants, fruits, or vegetables are represented in a naturalistic manner on this vessel. Yet, due to the incorporation of the Corn Configuration and the seed markers, the observer, already initiated in this subtle symbolism, can understand that agricultural abundance is very much a part of this representation.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Ethnographic and linguistic evidence from the Andean region provide comparable examples for the visual argument presented here. For instance, the link between the

## CONCLUSIONS

Several conclusions can be drawn from the identification of the seed marker and the Corn Configuration. The fragmentation of the Nasca mythical beings' bodies that occurs as a result of the placement of the figures around the cups allows these signs to exist independently of the larger figures. These signs can, therefore, exist and carry meaning independent of the larger figures, a meaning that is transferable to other figures as well, as is demonstrated here.

Although the Corn Configuration is specific in its direct references to the shape of a corn-cob, the seed marker is not a naturalistic representation of a bean or seed. The eye-hilum is shown on the tear-shaped motif that is usually assumed to be a bean, and yet it would be careless to call the eye a "bean marker" because: (1) it is represented alongside the Corn Configuration as well, and (2) the AMB is clearly associated with corn when depicted with rodents eating its body. The eye as a sign seems to indicate sprouting potential, the essence of a seed, more than a specific type of seed.

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eye and agriculture is also present in the Quechua language. The word *n̄awi*, which means "eye," can refer to the nodule from which something sprouts (Margot Beyersdorff, personal communication, 1998) or to a seed or even a spring (Classen 1993:110). *N̄awi* can also refer to dents or holes, but always in relation to plants or vegetables. Examples of this are the "eyes" of the potato, the black holes on bark, and the holes in the ground into which seeds are deposited (Herrero and Sánchez Lozada 1983: 258; Beyersdorff 1984:67). Furthermore, the *n̄awi* corn and the *n̄awi* potato refer to the seed corn and the seed potato, *i.e.* the seed separated to start the crop (Margot Beyersdorff, personal communication, 1998). In Quechua the eye is, therefore, associated with sprouting, agriculture, and the seeds themselves. According to Classen (1993:19), the Aymara term *nayra* evokes similar associations. Finally, like the Andean concept of *mallki*, a term that refers to both trees and ancestors, the AMB and the Mythical Harvester relate plant forms and humans, as well as life and death (*ibid.*: 89-90; González Holguín 1952:632).

The incorporation of the eye-shaped seed marker and the Corn Configuration into the bodies of the AMB and the Mythical Harvester is important for the understanding of these Nasca supernatural beings. These signs are not simply appendages or decorating elements; they transform the beings of which they are part. Therefore, one of the essential aspects of the AMB and the Mythical Harvester is that of plants. However, these figures are not simply associated with plant forms, they *are* plants. While both the AMB and the Mythical Harvester have strong connections to death iconography, life and fertility are represented on their bodies through the incorporation of the eye-shaped seed marker and/or the Corn Configuration. Like seeds, which appear to be dry and dead only to become green, moist, and full of life when planted, these beings embody the agricultural cycle of life from death<sup>13</sup> even when other naturalistic depictions of plants are not present.

The link between the eye, agriculture, and death is also present in a Nasca motif identified by Proulx as motif TH-3 or Symbolic Eye Form of Trophy Head (Proulx 2006:109), part of the iconography of Nasca Phases 5 and 6. Fragmentation is particularly important during Nasca 5, as *pars pro toto* representations are common in the iconography alongside the type of fragmentation described above. Proulx described this Symbolic Eye as an abbreviated trophy head, consisting only of the upturned eye and carrying cord (Figure 15). It seems to be significant, however, that the eye is used as a substitution for the entire head, and even more significant that the eye has an upturned or pendant pupil. As it is demonstrated above, drop-shaped seeds also have a pendant or eccentric pupil as a hilum. Because this is a trait of trophy head iconography, this motif seems to fully conflate

the trophy head with the seed. In fact, this could be an abbreviated version specifically of the Sprouting Head motif. The eye-shaped sign continues to be used as part of the visual vocabulary of Nasca artists through Nasca Phase 7 (see *ibid.*: 109-111). Although later phases of Nasca art need further study, as a research hypothesis I propose that the eye sign maintains these same meanings and associations throughout the rest of the Nasca sequence, regardless of the changes in style.

The seed marker and the Corn Configuration are both icons and symbols. The use of the eye to stand for the whole seed also involves a synecdochic relationship. At the same time these motifs act as symbols of agriculture and fertility, transforming their wearers even when naturalistic fruits and vegetables are not depicted. Formerly, the lack of representations of plants on some Nasca polychrome vessels has been used as evidence of the dichotomy between warfare and agriculture in Nasca art (Roark 1965; Proulx 1989), yet to the initiated observer, the simple representation of an eye may have been sufficient to evoke the ideas of seeds, plants, sprouting potential, or agricultural abundance.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The ideas in this article were originally presented at a seminar led by Dr. Terence Grieder at the University of Texas at Austin. A later version of that paper was presented in 2000 at the Nineteenth Annual Northeast Conference on Andean Archaeology and Ethnohistory. Dr. Donald Proulx and Merchant Adams read versions of this manuscript in various stages of completion.

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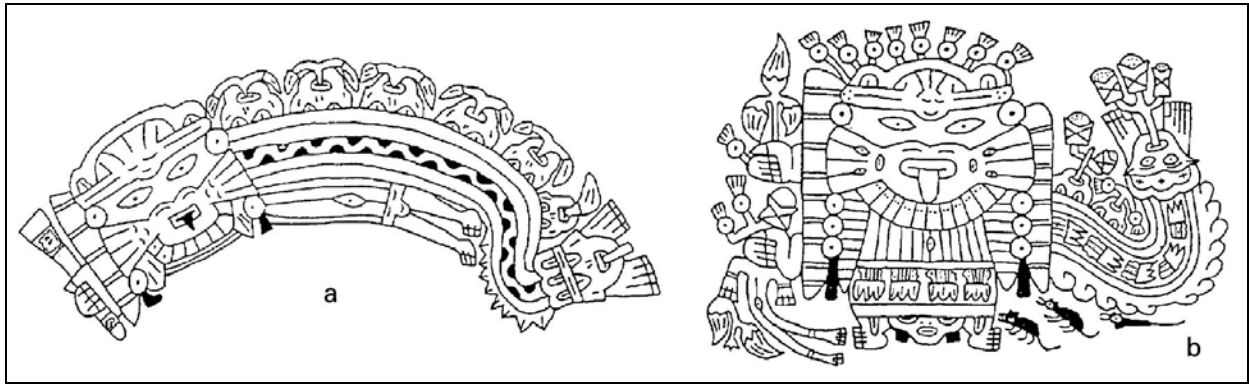


Figure 1a and 1b: Line drawings of two vessels depicting the Anthropomorphic Mythical Being (AMB) with the Sprouting Head motif (after Carmichael 1994: figures 17 and 19).



Figure 2a (left) and 2b (right): Anthropomorphic Mythical Being wrapped around a double-spouted vessel. Peru, Nasca culture, vessel, date unknown, ceramic and pigment, 4 1/8 inches (10.5 cm) high, 7 5/8 inches (19.4 cm) wide, Kate S. Buckingham Endowment, 1955.2127, The Art Institute of Chicago. Photography © The Art Institute of Chicago.



Figure 3a (left) and 3b (right): Anthropomorphic Mythical Being around a jar. Peru, South Coast, Cahuachi, Nasca Culture, Collar jar, ceramic and pigment, 5 inches (12.7 cm) high, 5½ inches (13.8 cm) wide, S.B. Williams Fund and Edward E. Ayer Endowment in memory of Charles L. Hutchinson, 1956.1178, The Art Institute of Chicago. Photography © The Art Institute of Chicago.



Figure 4a (left) and 4b (right): Anthropomorphic Mythical Being around a bowl. Peru, Nasca culture, bowl, ceramic and pigment, 3 5/8 inches (9.2 cm) high, 5½ inches (14 cm) wide, Kate S. Buckingham Endowment, 1955.1933, The Art Institute of Chicago. Photography © The Art Institute of Chicago.



Figure 5: Vessel depicting seeds. © 1953 The Field Museum, A94576, object number 170527.



Figure 6: Vessel depicting seeds, with points highlighted in black. © 1953 The Field Museum, A94580, object number 170536.

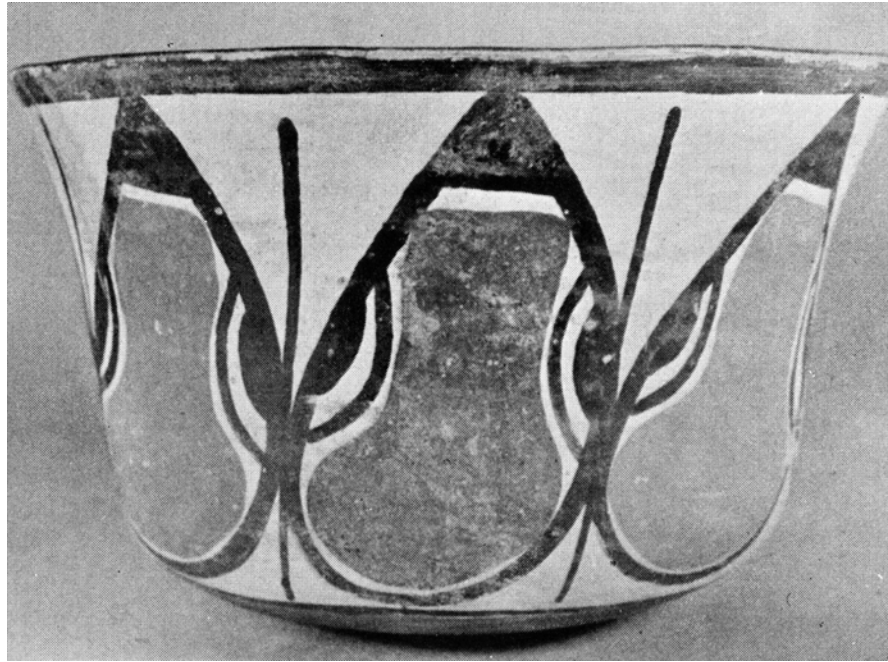


Figure 7: Depiction of seed with two hila (from Proulx 1968: plate 24b).

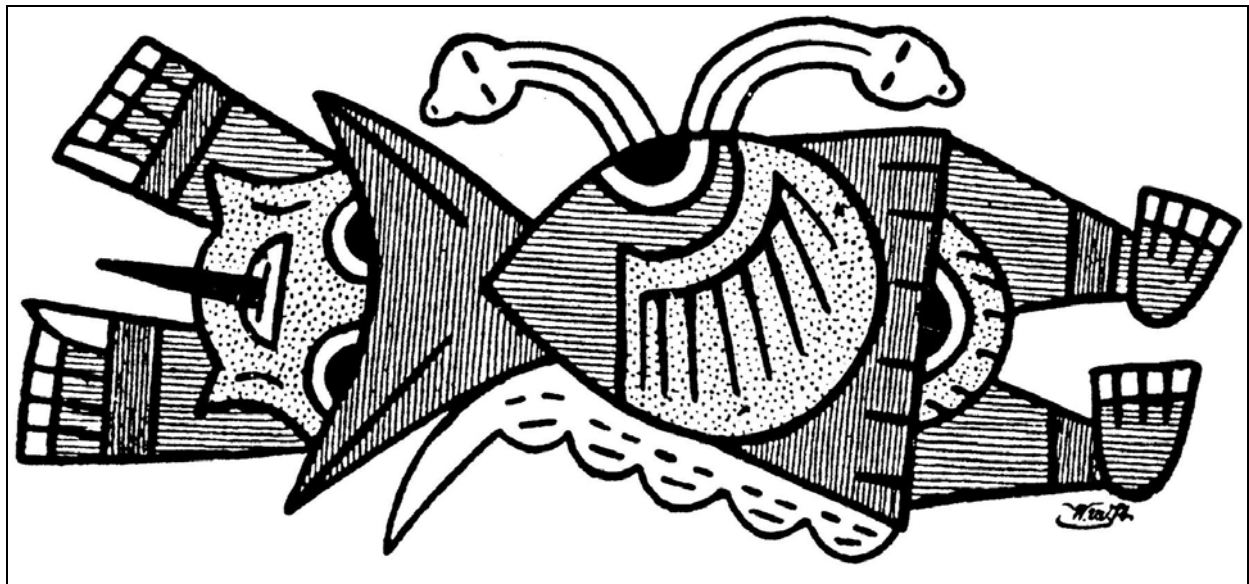


Figure 8: Extended figure with a seed as part of its torso (from Seler 1961: figure 403).





Figure 9: Anthropomorphic Mythical Being with a seed as part of its torso  
(from Seler 1961: figure 404).

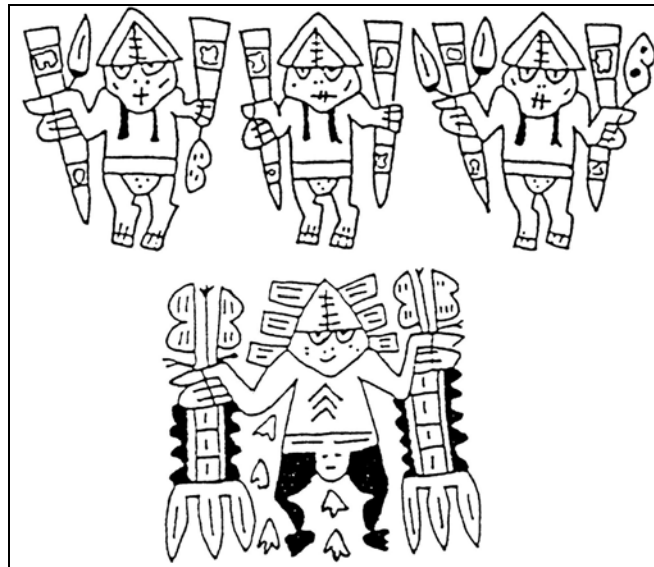


Figure 10: Harvester Figures (after Carmichael 1994: figures 15 and 13).

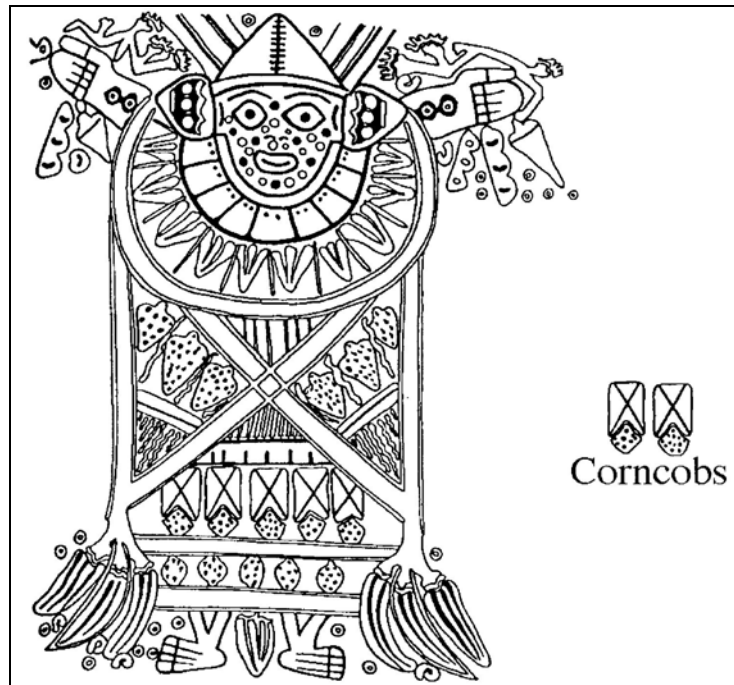


Figure 11: Mythical Harvester Figure and detail of corn-cobs on its waist. Shallow flared bowl, 10.8 cm high, 1955.1929, ©The Art Institute of Chicago, (drawing by Joanne Berens; after Townsend 1985: figure 7).

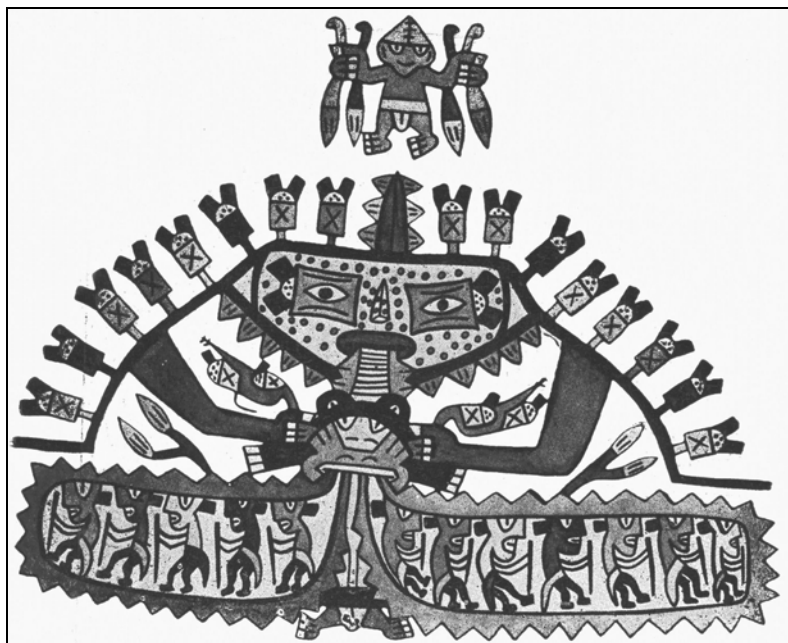


Figure 12: Effigy Harvester without the conical hat (from Tello 1959: figure 92).



Figure 13: Effigy Harvester, Museum of World Culture, Sweden  
(acquisition number: 35.32.3; from Zuidema 1972: figure 9).



Figure 14: Composition with multiple figures (after Tello 1959: lámina LXXXV).

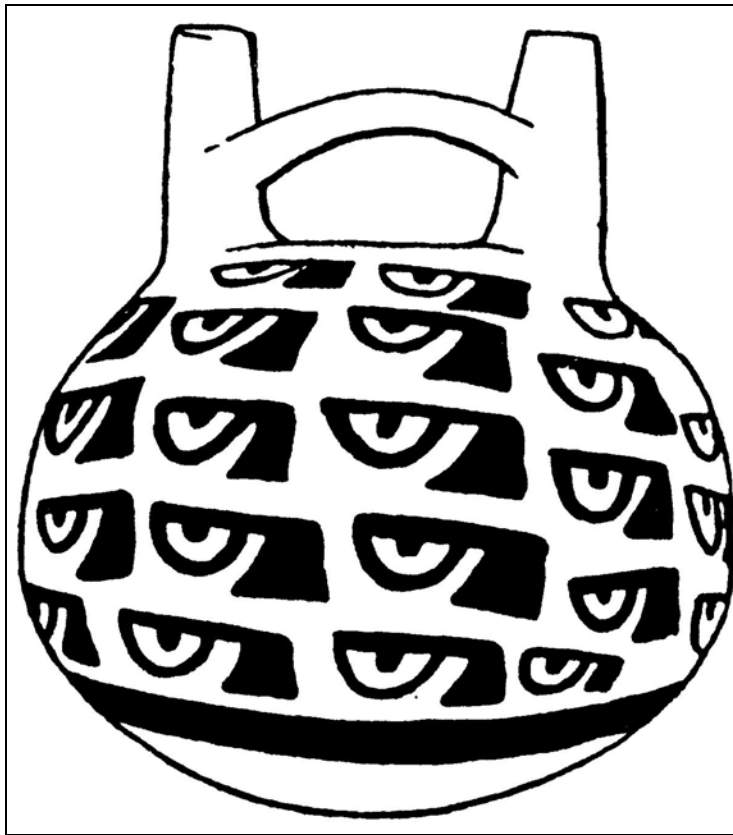


Figure 15: Motif TH-3: Symbolic Eye Form of Trophy Head  
(Proulx 2006:109; from Seler 1961: figure 202).

