

Chagas' disease in pre-Columbian South America

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The quest for the origin and dispersion of Chagas' disease, the second most important vector-borne disease in Latin America, has epidemiological, immunological, and genetical implications.

Conjectures based on accounts of chroniclers, reviews of the archaeological literature and the present distribution of triatomine bugs, the vectors of the disease, held that the origin of the adaptation of *Triatoma infestans* (a species of the subfamily Triatominae) to human dwellings occurred in prehistoric times. The autopsy of 35 mummies exhumed in the Chilean desert, dated between 470 B.C. and 600 A.D., revealed the presence of clinical manifestations of Chagas' disease and put earlier speculations on a factual basis. Copyright © 1985 Wiley-Liss, Inc., A Wiley Company