

Early Andean maize is unearthed

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Archaeologists say they've found evidence that ancient Peruvians grew maize more than a millennium earlier than previously thought.

Maize was originally cultivated in Mexico and archaeologists have evidence the crop was grown as early as 7,000 years ago in Ecuador. But they had not known how quickly the practice spread southward into the Andes.

The evidence was found at a dig at the Waynuna Site in Peru's Catahuasi Valley.

The researchers say the development of agriculture in that area marks a cornerstone in the development of civilization in the Andes -- a process that ultimately led to the rise of the Incas, who dominated the region from about 1100 A.D. until the arrival of European settlers.

Linda Perry of the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History in Washington, led the researchers who made the discovery that's detailed in this week's issue of the journal *Nature*.

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