

Ancient observatory found in Peru

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The oldest astronomical observatory in the Western Hemisphere has reportedly been discovered a few miles north of Lima, Peru.

The site, including ornate carvings more sophisticated than any found before in the same area, dates back 4,200 years -- 800 years before such artistic and scientific skill was previously known to have existed in the Americas, National Geographic News reported Wednesday.

Archeologists say the observatory was part of a temple built by an unidentified civilization from Peru's "pre-ceramic" period, which predated the Inca culture by thousands of years.

Scientists told NGN they found a giant carving of what looks like a frowning face, aligned with the directions of sunrise and sunset at critical points in the agricultural calendar, including Dec. 21, the start of the Southern Hemisphere's growing season, and June 21, the end of the harvest period.

Lead researcher Robert Benfer, an anthropologist at the University of Missouri-Columbia, reported the discovery during an April meeting of the Society for American Archaeology in Puerto Rico.

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