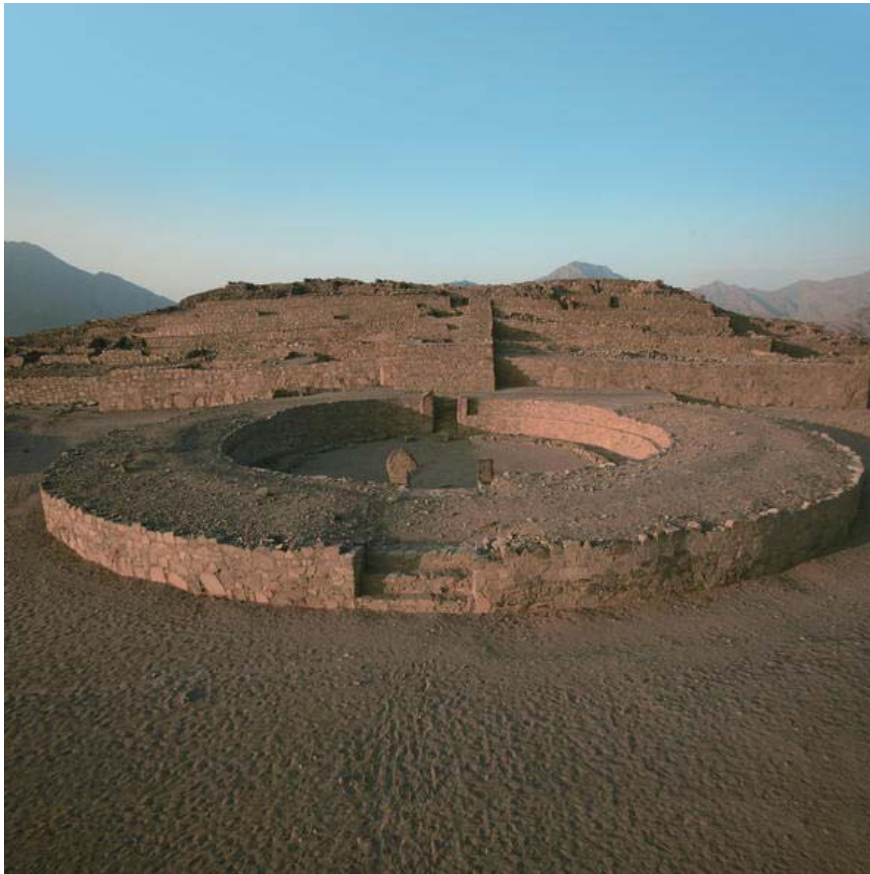


UNESCO

Sacred City of Caral-Supe

The 5000-year-old 626-hectare archaeological site of The Sacred City of Caral-Supe is situated on a dry desert terrace overlooking the green valley of the Supe river. It dates back to the Late Archaic Period of the Central Andes and is the oldest centre of civilization in the Americas. Exceptionally well-preserved, the site is impressive in terms of its design and the complexity of its architectural, especially its monumental stone and earthen platform mounts and sunken circular courts. One of 18 urban settlements situated in the same area, Caral features complex and monumental architecture, including six large pyramidal structures. A quipu (the knot system used in Andean civilizations to record information) found on the site testifies to the development and complexity of Caral society. The city's plan and some of its components, including pyramidal structures and residence of the elite, show clear evidence of ceremonial functions, signifying a powerful religious ideology.



Outstanding Universal Value

Brief Synthesis

The Sacred City of Caral-Supe reflects the rise of civilisation in the Americas. As a fully developed socio-political state, it is remarkable for its complexity and its impact on developing settlements throughout the Supe Valley and beyond. Its early use of the

quipu as a recording device is considered of great significance. The design of both the architectural and spatial components of the city is masterful, and the monumental platform mounds and recessed circular courts are powerful and influential expressions of a consolidated state.

Criterion (ii): Caral is the best representation of Late Archaic architecture and town planning in ancient Peruvian civilisation. The platform mounds, sunken circular courts, and urban plan, which developed over centuries, influenced nearby settlements and subsequently a large part of the Peruvian coast.

Criterion (iii): Within the Supe Valley, the earliest known manifestation of civilisation in the Americas, Caral is the most highly-developed and complex example of settlement within the civilisation's formative period (the Late Archaic period).

Criterion (iv): Caral is impressive in terms of the design and complexity of its architectural and spatial elements, especially its monumental earthen platform mounds and sunken circular courts, features that were to dominate a large part of the Peruvian coast for many centuries.

Integrity and Authenticity

Caral is remarkably intact, largely because of its early abandonment and late discovery. Once abandoned, it appears to have been occupied only twice and then not systematically: once in the so-called Middle Formative or Early Horizon, about 1000 B.C.; and once in the States and Lordships period, between 900 and 1440 A.D. Since both these settlements were on the outskirts of the city, they did not disturb the ancient architectural structures. In addition, since the site lacked gold and silver finds, there was little looting. The site has no modern permanent constructions in its immediate surroundings (except for tourism facilities built from local materials). It is part of a cultural and natural landscape of great beauty, relatively untouched by development. Most development has occurred in low valley areas near Lima (to the south of the site). The middle Supe Valley, where the site is located, is an area dedicated to non-industrialised agriculture. There is little argument about the authenticity of the site. Radiocarbon analysis carried out by the Caral-Supe Special Archaeological Project (PEACS) at the Caral site confirms that the development of the site can be located in time between the years 3000 to 1800 B.C. and, more specifically, to the Late Archaic Period.

Management and protection requirements

The management system in place is adequate, and a recently modified Management Plan (as of late 2008) has been implemented. The modified plan includes regulations to guarantee the preservation and conservation of the property.

Historical Description

During its period of occupancy, approximately 1,000 years, Caral was remodelled several times. In fact, almost all of the buildings show successive periods of occupation.

Research carried out by a cross-disciplinary team has demonstrated that although the Supe Valley settlements were occupied in 3000 B.C., it was not until 2600 B.C. that their occupants became part of an organised social system with a "capital zone" in the lower middle valley. And it was this zone that was the centre of the most outstanding social and cultural tradition of the time.

Based on socio-cultural information and dating data, the theory has been posited that the influence of the social system of Supe first affected the populations of the nearest valleys. It then extended further and, by 2200 B.C., its influence had spread as far south as the archaeological site of El Paraiso in the Chillón Valley, and to all the valleys northward as far as the Santa River Valley.

The chronological sequence is summarised as follows:

- Remote Period (before 3000 B.C.): Land possession by groups of families/lineages.
- Ancient Period (3000-2600 B.C.): "Capital zone" growth; plazas and impressive buildings constructed.
- Final Middle Period (2300-2200 B.C.): Buildings enlarged in area and volume; large platforms and plazas constructed.
- Initial Late Period (2200-2100 B.C.): Public buildings remodelled; plazas constructed with quadrangular platform framework.
- Final Late Period (2100-1800 B.C.): Public buildings remodelled (using smaller stones); occupation of site reduced.

Throughout the occupancy of the site, there have been periods of great change, and it is possible to see clear distinctions in the design and architecture of the city, and the burial and renewal of buildings. There have also been minor changes or phases within each of the periods.

Each period is distinguishable from the one preceding it in several ways: elements of architectural style; building techniques; materials; and the colour of paint used on walls. However, the overall design is maintained as well as the associated cultural traditions and building functions. In reply to the letter sent to the State Party by ICOMOS on 13 January 2009 asking for further information regarding the sacred nature of the site, the State Party on 27 February 2009 explained to the satisfaction of ICOMOS the reason for this descriptor. The archaeological work to date has enabled researchers to establish the sacred nature of Caral through both architectural and contextual analyses. Both the city (in its urban plan) and its component parts (including, for example, the pyramidal structures and residences of the elite) show clear evidence of ceremonial functions, thereby signifying what can be called a powerful religious ideology.