The Norte Chico civilization, also known as Caral or Caral-Supe, was a complex Pre-Columbian society in north-central coastal Peru.

It is the oldest known civilization in the Americas, flourishing between the thirtieth century B.C.E. and the eighteenth century B.C.E.

The name Caral-Supe is derived from Caral in the Supe Valley, a significant Norte Chico site.

Norte Chico emerged about a millennium after Sumer and was contemporaneous with the pyramids of Ancient Egypt.

This civilization predated the Mesoamerican Olmec by nearly two millennia.

Norte Chico is classified as a Preceramic culture of the pre-Columbian Late Archaic, lacking ceramics and significant art.

The civilization's most impressive achievements include monumental architecture, large platform mounds, and sunken circular plazas.

Archaeological evidence suggests the use of textile technology and possibly the worship of common god symbols.

A sophisticated government is assumed to have managed the ancient Norte Chico, particularly regarding food resources and politics.

The Norte Chico civilization did not engage in any type of violence according to available evidence.

People moved from family units into larger groups resembling "states" for mutual defense of scarce resources.

The shift to greater complexity in society does not appear to have been driven by the need for defense or warfare.

The basis of power in this society lay in promoting the common good.

Archaeologists have known about ancient sites in the area since at least the 1940s.

Early archaeological work occurred at Aspero on the coast and later at Caral further inland.

Peruvian archaeologist Ruth Shady Solís led extensive documentation of the civilization in the late 1990s.

A 2001 paper in Science and a 2004 article in Nature highlighted the significance of Norte Chico and sparked widespread interest.

Andean Peru is one of six global areas recognized for the indigenous development of civilization.

Norte Chico has pushed back the timeline for complex societies in the Peruvian region by centuries.

The Chavín culture, around 900 B.C.E., was previously considered the first civilization in the area.

The Norte Chico civilization challenges the notion of laggardness in the Pre-Columbian Americas.

The discovery of Norte Chico shifted research focus from the highlands of the Andes to the coastal regions of Peru.

Norte Chico is located 150 to 200 km north of modern-day Lima, bounded by the Lurín Valley and the Casma Valley.

The civilization comprises four coastal valleys: Huaura, Supe, Pativilca, and Fortaleza.

Known sites are concentrated in the Supe, Pativilca, and Fortaleza valleys, covering only 1,800 km².

Norte Chico is considered an "improbable" candidate for the "pristine" development of civilization due to its extremely arid environment.

The region is punctuated by over 50 rivers carrying Andean snowmelt, which enabled widespread irrigation.

Monumental architecture at various Norte Chico sites has been found close to irrigation channels.

Radiocarbon dating indicates some human settlement in the Pativilca and Fortaleza areas before 3500 B.C.E.

Large-scale human settlement and communal construction at Norte Chico became apparent from 3200 B.C.E. onward.

The earliest securely associated city date is 3500 B.C.E. at Huaricanga in the Fortaleza area.

Development of coastal and inland sites occurred in parallel until a shift toward inland sites between 2500 and 2000 B.C.E.

The Norte Chico civilization began to decline around 1800 B.C.E., as more powerful centers emerged nearby.

The civilization's success in irrigation-based agriculture may have contributed to its decline.

A broad outline of the Norte Chico diet includes domesticated plants like squash, beans, lucuma, guava, and significant seafood components.

Animal remains at Caral are almost exclusively marine, including clams, mussels, anchovies, and sardines.

The role of seafood in the Norte Chico diet has been a subject of ongoing debate among researchers.

Michael E. Moseley proposed a maritime subsistence economy as the basis for Norte Chico society in 1973.

The theory of a "maritime foundation of Andean civilization" contrasts with the long-held view of intensive agriculture as essential for complex societies.

Ideological power in Norte Chico was linked to access to deities and the supernatural.

An image of the Staff God, a significant deity in later Andean cultures, was found on a gourd dated to 2250 B.C.E.

The construction and maintenance of architecture may have involved communal exaltation and ceremony.

Caral is referred to as "the sacred city," with socio-economic and political focus on its temples.

There is no evidence of warfare or violence during the Preceramic Period in Norte Chico.

Mutilated bodies, burned buildings, and signs of conflict are absent from the archaeological record.

The lack of defensive settlement patterns contradicts typical archaeological theories about the evolution of societies.

The power of rulers in Norte Chico was rooted in collective economic and spiritual welfare.

Norte Chico sites are notable for their exceptional collective density and individual size.

Haas argues that Norte Chico may have been the most densely populated area of the world during the third millennium B.C.E.

The Supe, Pativilca, and Fortaleza Valleys contain large clusters of sites, with only one site found in the Huaura Valley.

The site at Aspero, at the mouth of the Supe Valley, suggested extensive prehistoric construction activity over approximately 13 hectares.

Evidence of small-scale terracing and sophisticated platform mound masonry was noted at Aspero.

Up to eleven artificial mounds, termed "Corporate Labor Platforms," may have been present at various sites.

The northern rivers survey revealed sites ranging from 10 to 100 hectares, with large platform mounds discovered.

Caral's central zone, known for monumental architecture, covers over 65 hectares and features six platform mounds and sunken plazas.

Monumental architecture was constructed using quarried stone and river cobbles, moved by hand in reed "shicra-bags."

The Piramide Mayor at Caral measures 160 m by 150 m and rises 18 m high.

Workers may have been "paid or compelled" to engage in centralized construction projects, possibly using dried anchovies as currency.

Leadership in Norte Chico was based on "ideology, charisma, and skillfully timed reinforcement."