

# Ancient American Civilizations

## **Caral-Supe**

Caral-Supe was a complex society that existed before Columbus crossed the Atlantic. It had as many as thirty major population centers in what is now northern coastal Peru. The civilization flourished between the 4000 – 2000 BC. From 3100 BC onward, large settlement and communal buildings were constructed. This lasted until a period of decline around 1800 BC. It has been recognized as the oldest-known civilization in America. This civilization flourished along three rivers: the Fortaleza, the Pativilca, and the Supe.

## **Olmecs**

The Olmec civilization was the first civilization in Central America. It began around 1600–1400 BC and ending around 400 BC. This civilization is considered the founding culture of the Mesoamerican civilizations, such as the Mayans and Aztecs. The Mesoamerican calendar, numeral system, writing, and much of the Mesoamerican culture seem to have begun with the Olmec. The Olmecs farmed maize around 5100 BC. Agriculture continued to be mixed with a hunting-gathering-fishing lifestyle until quite late compared to other regions, but by 2700 BC, Mesoamericans were relying on maize, and living mostly in villages. Temple mounds and social classes started to appear. By 1200 BC, small city-states started to arise. The Olmec cities had ceremonial complexes with earth/clay pyramids, palaces, stone monuments, aqueducts and walled plazas. The first of these centers was at San Lorenzo (until 900 BC). Olmec artisans sculpted jade and clay figurines of jaguars and humans. Their iconic giant heads – believed to be of Olmec rulers – stood in every major city.

