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The hidden staircase in the 4,000-year-old temple has revealed what may be the oldest documented mural in the Americas. Ignacio Alva/Reuters (handout)

[The Oldest Construction in America](#)

4,000 years old

The pre-Columbian America had two centers where complex civilizations developed: Mexico and Peru. At that time sophisticated cities and huge pyramidal temples were built. Now, a Peruvian team seems to have discovered the oldest mural ever found in the Americas, close to the Peruvian coast, at the Ventarrón site, in Lambayeque valley, about 800 km(500 mi) north of Lima. Carbon dating effectuated in US revealed the ancient wall was 4,000 years old.

Ventarrón, discovered in the 1980s, is found just 12 mi (20 km) from Sipán, the center of the Moche civilization, an ancient Peruvian civilization whose peak was reached between the 1st and the 7th century A.D.

"The Ventarrón mural and structures predate Sipán by nearly 2,000 years. The structures were made from "primitive" materials but were relatively sophisticated in some ways," said archaeologist Walter Alva, director of the Royal Tombs of Sipán Museum, who first discovered Ventarrón.

The archaeologists discovered two wall paintings after encountering a staircase going to a hidden altar. One painting represented a deer caught in a net, the other was a red-and-white model.

"The stairway caught our attention because it is an architectural oddity in that region. Also strange, the temple was built from blocks of river sediment rather than adobe or stone. Though the construction materials were very primitive, the mural and structures themselves are surprisingly sophisticated and artistically elaborate. The site was built by a culture that predated other pre-Columbian cultures such as the Cupisnique, Chavinoide, Chavín, and Moche," said Alva.

"Some of the artifacts found in Ventarrón suggest that the region of Lambayeque was a cultural exchange point between Peru's Pacific coast and other regions," he added.

The researchers discovered offerings like the skeletons of a parrot and a monkey, both brought from Peru's wet eastern jungles, while shells encountered at the site belong to species encountered only on the coasts of Ecuador.

"This finding suggests that societies in their formative period, the period before complex societies came into being, extended into the northern reaches of Peru earlier than we thought," said Luis Jaime Castillo who is an archaeologist at Peru's Catholic University in Lima.

Ventarrón has been almost totally destroyed by the locals who have excavated almost completely the site to get materials required to build adobe houses and corrals.

Moreover, "the tomb was ransacked in 1990 and 1992, but the raiders failed to find the staircase leading to the temple." said Alva.

