Preceramic Adoption of Peanut, Squash, and Cotton in Northern Peru

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The early development of agriculture in the New World has been assumed to involve early farming in settlements in the Andes, but the record has been sparse. Peanut (Arachis sp.), squash (Cucurbita moschata), and cotton (Gossypium barbadense) macrofossils were excavated from archaeological sites on the western slopes of the northern Peruvian Andes. Direct radiocarbon dating indicated that these plants grew between 9240 and 5500 14C years before the present. These and other plants were recovered from multiple locations in a tropical dry forest valley, including household clusters, permanent architectural structures, garden plots, irrigation canals, hoes, and storage structures. These data provide evidence for early use of peanut and squash in the human diet and of cotton for industrial purposes and indicate that horticultural economies in parts of the Andes took root by about 10,000 years ago.

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