Painted Textile
Peru, likely late Middle Horizon period (800-1000 CE)
Gift of Dr. Thomas Barbour, 1938. PM 38-51-30/1696
Courtesy of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology, Harvard University

From the collections of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology

This happy, smiling face on an ancient textile from the coast of Peru was made in about 800-1000 C.E. Experts aren’t sure if a sun is depicted and they might argue about whether the face is really smiling. But it seems reasonable to think that it is the sun, because of the rays, and that it is smiling too! The "stepped pyramid" motif, just below it, suggests that the sun is rising above a temple and the stepped designs in the corners may represent agricultural terraces. The waves at the edge of the textile complete the image to include both the ocean and land, the two great providers of food and, therefore, life, in ancient Peru and everywhere else.

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