

# Ancient North American Civilizations



"South American and Eastern Oceania Tattoo History, Culture, Tattoos Designs and Symbols, Tattoo Photos." Tattoo Museum. 2014. Web. 18 June 2015.

## Background

Roughly 10,000 years ago the hunter-gatherers crossed the **Beringia** (land bridge) and entered the Americas. As they continued to migrate, groups began to settle in different parts of the North American continent. As the water levels gradually rose at the end of the Ice Age, these groups became isolated from the rest of the world for thousands of years to come. These groups overtime would form civilizations and develop their own unique cultural traits and characteristics. Each civilization became unique to their geographic location and their ability to adapt to their surroundings.

A **culture area** is a region in which people share a similar way of life. Within each culture area, there were many different Native American Indian tribes.

A **tribe** is a group of villages or settlements that shares common customs, language, and rituals. Members of a tribe saw themselves as a distinct people who shared the same origin. Tribes felt a strong bond with the land, plants, and animals in the region where they lived. Members of the tribe tried to keep a balance with the forces of natural world. Throughout history, tribal organizations have played an important role in Native American life.

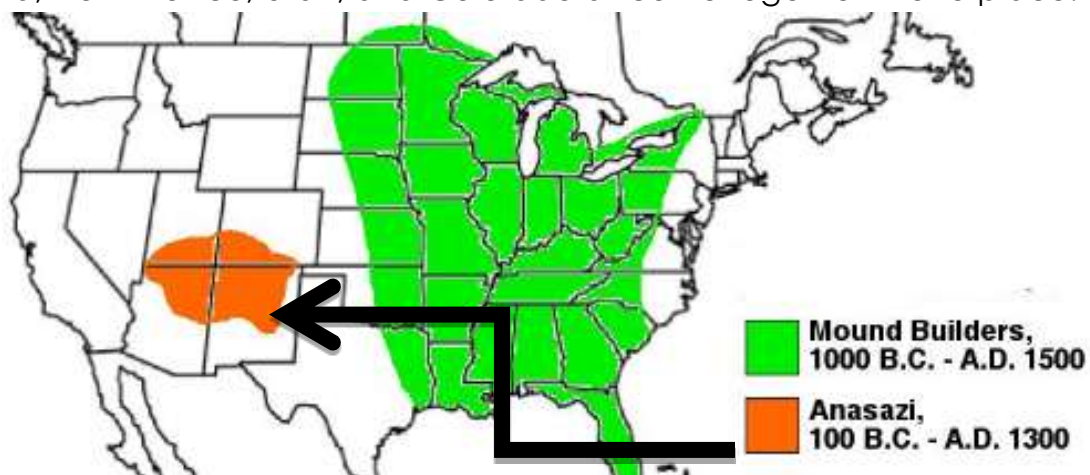
## Anasazi (Pueblo) “Cliff Dwellers”

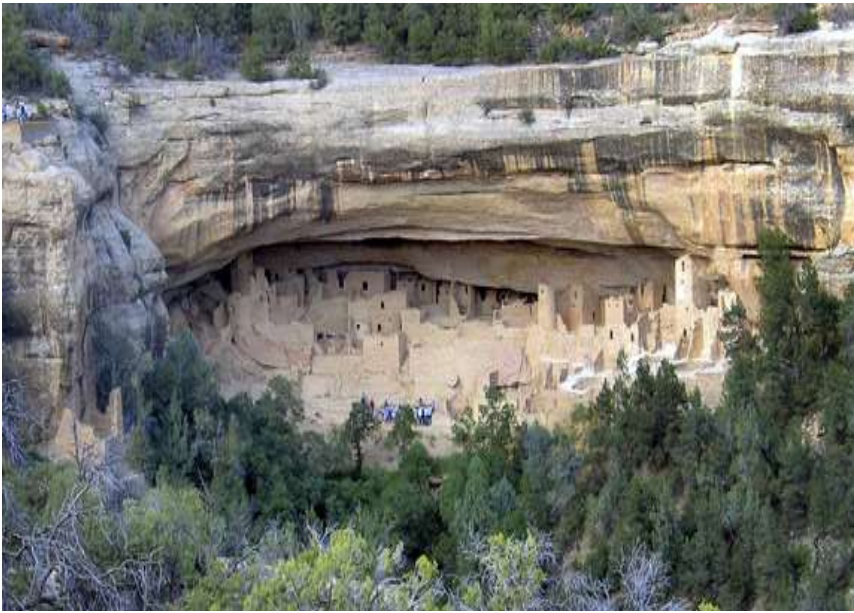


Papenheim, Brian. "Native American: Regions, Natural, Human, and Capital Resources." Everyday Americans Exceptional Americans. 2013. Web. 17 June 2015.

### Geography

The **Anasazi (Pueblo)** civilization was located in the desert region of the southwestern United States. This part of North America is very arid (dry), with little annual rainfall. The Anasazi (Pueblo) adapted to their environment by building their homes literally into the rugged cliffs of **Chaco Canyon**. It was here they built a massive complex called **Pueblo Bonito**, which housed over 1,000 people with 800 rooms. The cliffs gave them protection from invaders, shade from the sun, and shielded them from the harsh elements of the desert. The homes the Anasazi built were multistoried, just like modern day apartments or condos. They made them from **adobe** (dried mud) bricks, wood, and stone. Toeholds cut into the rock and ladders let the Anasazi climb up and down the cliff walls. Today we call this part of the country the “Four Corners”, because the states of Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and Colorado all come together in one place.





Picture of Chaco Canyon showing the massive complex of Pueblo Bonito. Notice how it is literally built into the walls of the canyon.



The Anasazi built their homes out of adobe brick, stone, and the limited wood they had available. Notice how they are multistoried.

<http://cas.umkc.edu/art/faculty/wahlman/quizzes/SWChacoCanyoPuebloBonito.b.jpg>

"Cliff Palace." National Parks Service. U.S. Department of the Interior, 16 June 2015. Web. 17 June 2015

**Question: How did the Anasazi use geography to their advantage? Explain**

**Question: Using the images above, compare the Anasazi's homes to a modern day apartment complex.**

### **Government/Society**

The Anasazi (Pueblo) had a very loose government structure; it was organized by **clans** (families). Each clan chose a family member to become part of a tribal council that governed society and made decisions for the tribe. Clan leaders represented their families at all tribal meetings and village councils. Leaders created a central location to meet where they conducted their meetings.

**Question: How might a family select the leader of their clan leader?**

**Question: What characteristics do you think a good tribal leader needs?**

### **Religion**

The Anasazi (Pueblo) culture practiced polytheism; they had many gods that were related to nature such as the sun god, rain god, sky father, the son chief and mother earth. Their religious beliefs reflected the importance of farming. Most Pueblo villages had an underground chamber, where the men held religious ceremonies. Through prayers and other rituals, they tried to please the spirits of nature, such as wind, rain, and thunder. The underground chamber was also used to hold village government meetings, to store extra corn, and conduct trade. They were a peaceful people and were in tune with nature of

the world. They respected one another and believed that good comes to those who do good in their daily lives. Their religious ceremonies revolved around food and the coming of the seasons.

### **Trade/Achievements**

Trading with other tribes was the main way the Anasazi (Pueblo) culture got the items they needed for survival. A network of roads connected their villages to each other. Along these roads, traders carried cotton, sandals made from yucca leaves, and blankets woven from turkey feathers.

The Anasazi (Pueblo) were expert craftsmen who were known for their **turquoise jewelry**, intricately woven baskets, and black-on-white pottery with elaborate designs. They traded far and wide, including even trading with the Aztecs in far-away in central Mexico.



<http://www.onlinejewelryclass.biz/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/fab-fashion-fix-searched-for-turquoise-jewelry-offers-from-high-street-37068.jpg>  
Anthony, Alexander. "Hopi Second Mesa Deep Pictorial Basket." Hopi Second Mesa Deep Pictorial Basket. Web. 17 June 2015.  
"Anasazi Pottery Pitcher." ICollectorcom Online Auctions Upcoming Auctions. Web. 17 June 2015.

### **Agriculture**

The Anasazi (Pueblo) were **subsistence farmers**. This meant that they grew just enough food for their families to live off of with little to no extra. The dry desert of the southwest United States provided many challenges to growing crops. The Anasazi solved this problem by creating an irrigation system to capture rain from on top of the Mesas. They dug canals and ditches to bring the rain water all the way down to the canyon floor where the crops were located. The tribe grew maize/corn, squash, and beans. They supplemented their daily diets by hunting game and collecting wild plants. The adoption of the bow appears to have increased their hunting proficiency, resulting in some game animals, like deer and turkeys.

**Question: Identify and explain at least two ways the Anasazi adapted to their environment.**

## Decline

After hundreds of years, the Anasazi mysteriously abandoned the heart of their civilization, Pueblo Bonito. No one is certain why they decided to leave Chaco Canyon, but the most widely accepted theory is that years of successive drought forced them to relocate. The Anasazi did not have a writing system, but archeological remains and oral stories have allowed us to learn much about their civilization. Their art and architecture has continued to influence the tribes of the region to this day. Overtime the Anasazi became the Pueblo and splinted into tribes such as the Hopi and Zuni.

## Adena/Hopewell "Burial Mound Builders"



"Virtual First Ohioans." Ohio History Connection. Web. 17 June 2015.

## Geography

The **Adena/Hopewell** civilization was located in the *Eastern Woodlands* of the Ohio Valley. This fertile area was very lush, green, and full of animal life. This region provided many natural resources, which could be used for trade.



### **Government/Society**

The **Adena** civilization was described as a *conglomerate* (parts that are grouped together to form a whole, but remain distinct entities). These Native American Indian communities dominated the central and southern regions of the Ohio Valley from roughly 1000 B.C. to 200 B.C. The Adena people lived in structured villages and were self-sufficient.

The Adena civilization eventually became the **Hopewell**. The Hopewell civilization was not a single society or peoples either. They were also a conglomerate and were made up of an interaction amongst a number of different parts. This system of interaction peaked 200 B.C. to 400 A.D. The Hopewell became very powerful and carried great influence in the region. They also lived in structured villages and were self-sufficient.

**Question: How was the Adena/Hopewell conglomerate similar to ancient Greece?**

**Question: What do you think a civilization needs to be self-sufficient? Explain**

### **Religion**

The Adena/Hopewell culture was polytheistic and practiced many unique religious rituals. They worshipped nature and held a great respect for the animals of the Eastern Woodlands such as birds, wolves, bear, and deer. One of the biggest aspects of their region was how they took care of their dead. Important members of the tribe received special burials. Wooden structures were built to house the body of the dead. The body was then prepared for the afterlife and was often painted. Goods such as jewelry and other items were placed next to the body. The body and the artifacts were then burned to honor the dead. After the cremation the structure was then covered by thousands of baskets of dirt. Members of the tribe would carry the dirt in 3 gallon containers and dump it on the structure. Gradually, the pile would get higher and higher until it became a large mound of dirt. It is estimated that it took a minimum of 17,000 containers of dirt to make a burial mound. As new generations of people lived and died this process was repeated. They were simply added to the mound and buried inside. Some of the mounds have been measured at 40 feet tall and 100 feet across.

**Question: Compare and contrast the religious beliefs of the Adena/Hopewell with those of Egypt.**



Adena/Hopewell burial mound located in central

"Nature's Scenic View: Hopewell Mounds Chillicothe, Ohio." Web. 17 June 2015.



X-ray view inside an Adena/Hopewell burial mound

"Ohio's Adena Culture | Mound Builders." Touring Ohio. Web. 17 June 2015.

The Adena/Hopewell people did not live near the burial mounds, kind of like people today do not want to live near a cemetery. These mounds were considered sacred land and were only used to bury the dead. Several burial mound complexes can be found throughout central and southern Ohio and are now state parks.

### **Agriculture**

The Adena/Hopewell civilization were **subsistence farmers**. They grew just enough food for their families to live off of with little to no extra. They built their farms and grew their crops along the fertile rivers and streams of the Ohio Valley. They grew various crops such as squash, sunflowers, gourds, and barley. This region also provided them with the opportunity for hunting and fishing.

### **Trade/Achievements**

The Adena/Hopewell culture had an extensive trade network that stretched west to Wyoming, south to Gulf Coast, east to the Atlantic, and north to the Great Lakes. Archeologists have discovered artifacts representing all of these far away trade partners in the Ohio Valley.

The Adena/Hopewell culture is known for producing exquisite **copper jewelry** and fine pottery.



"Ancient Shell Gorget Depicts Griffin-Like Creature." Ohio History Connection Archaeology Blog. 27 Feb. 2015. Web. 18 June 2015.



Thorton, Stuart. "Intriguing Interactions." - National Geographic Education. National Geographic Society, 10 Nov. 2011. Web. 18 June 2015.

The most well-known achievement of the Adena/Hopewell culture is their burial mounds (covered under religion). However, they also constructed several ceremonial mounds in the shape of animals. These mounds were often used to convey an idea or a myth. The most famous of these ceremonial mounds is the "**Great Serpent Mound**" which was made in the shape of a serpent swallowing an oval object. This effigy mound is said to represent an ancient Native American Indian myth, where a serpent swallows the sun. The mound was built in a way to line up with lunar events, such as the head facing the sunset of the summer solstice. It is a constant topic of debate amongst scholars/historians and has been named a wonder of the ancient world by National Geographic Magazine. This effigy mound continues to reveal its secrets and teach us about the Adena/Hopewell beliefs.



"Serpent Mound." World Heritage Ohio. World Heritage Ohio, 2014. Web. 18 June 2015.



**Question: Why do you think the Adena/Hopewell would build this effigy mound to line up with astronomical things such as the solstice, star constellations, etc.? What other civilizations did the same thing when building?**

**Question: What advantages were there to having such a large trade network?**

**Question: The Adena/Hopewell used copper to make jewelry. How do we use copper today in our society?**

### **Decline**

Around 500 A.D. the Adena/Hopewell culture began to decline mysteriously. Their trade interaction came to an abrupt halt, art was no longer produced, and there was a shift from mound building to the construction of fortifications. As the population began to disperse, their culture would influence later tribes of the Eastern Woodlands.

## **Mississippian**

“Platform Mound Builders”



"Gallery | Ancient America." Ancient America. Web. 18 June 2015.

## Geography

The Mississippian civilization was located along the flood plain and fertile valleys of the Mississippi River. This fertile area was very lush, green, and full of animal life. This region provided many natural resources, which could be used for trade.

**Question: What other civilizations settled next to major rivers?**

**Question: What are advantages to living next to a river? Disadvantages? Explain.**

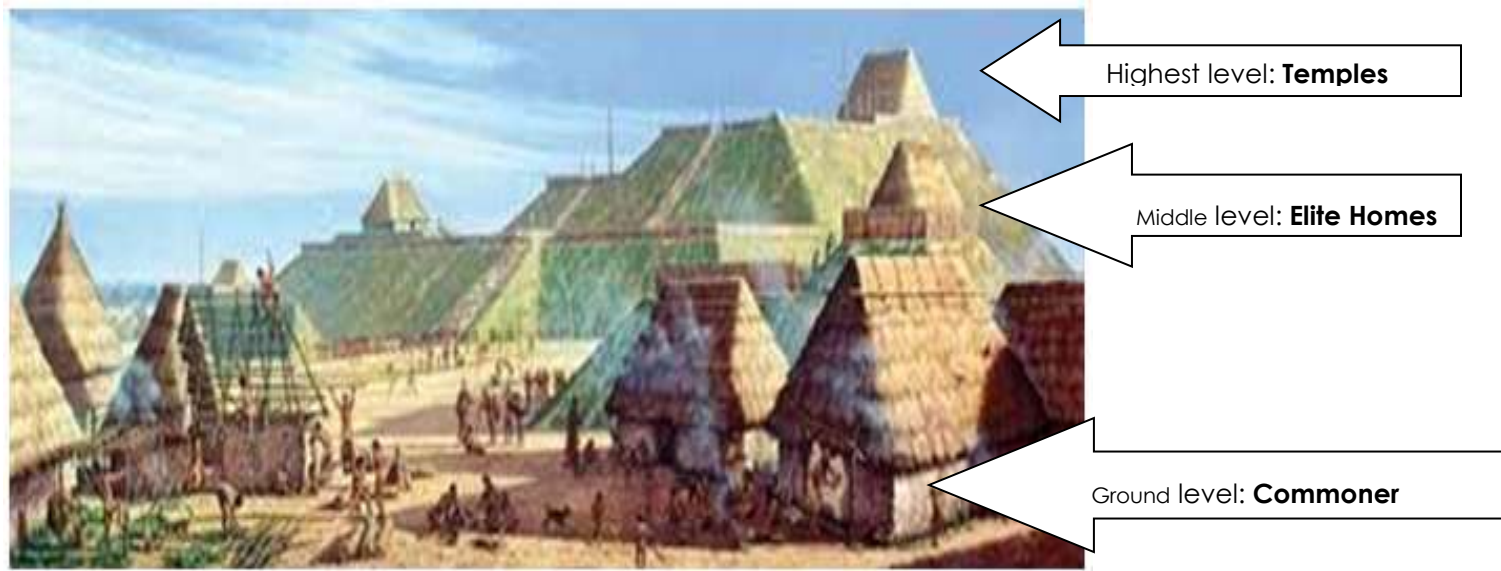


<http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-Guma1spAFYw/U-o1Uc2ZX9I/AAAAAAAAAOdU/WC8RPQJviW0/s1600/200A-Image%2BMound%2B%2BBuilders%2BMap.jpg>

## Government/Society

Mississippian society was complex with power resting in the hands of an **elite few**. These tribal chiefs controlled defined areas of the region from one village or settlement. The ruling elite had homes built on top of rectangular **platform mounds**. They used social ranking as a fundamental part of their social structure. The Mississippian social hierarchy consisted of two parts; the **elites** and the **commoners**. The elites made up the smallest percentage of the population and were the top of the Mississippian social pyramid. The commoners made up the majority of the population and were on the bottom of the Mississippian social pyramid. Your social rank was determined by ideology rather than wealth or military power. It was believed that the tribal chief and his family were descendants of the sun. The people believed that they possessed the power to make the sun rise, bring the spring rains, and cause the fall harvest to come on

time. The commoners were the farmers, craftsmen, warriors, and laborers for public works projects (ex: building platform mounds).



Kitt, Sally. "Cahokia: Mirror of the Cosmos." Cahokia: Cosmic Landscape Architecture. University of Chicago Press. Web. 18 June 2015.

Villages were built close to the Mississippi River and its tributaries. They consisted of a central plaza, residential zone, and defensive structures. The plaza was the service place for religious and social ceremonies. Residential zones are where the commoners lived. The defensive structure was a pole wall known as a **palisade**; sometimes there was a ditch outside the wall to help keep animals and people out of the village.

### **Religion**

The Mississippian culture was polytheistic and worshipped nature. Spiritual ceremonies were led by the high priest and tribal chief to mark the passing of the seasons, celestial events, and harvesting of the crops. They prayed to the spirits of the Eastern Woodland animals that they hunted and asked for forgiveness for taking their lives. The importance of the wetlands around the Mississippi River was reflected in the frequent use of frogs, turtles, duck, and other aquatic animals as decorations on pipes, bowls, and other ornamental items. Members carved animals on utensils and pottery used for feasts and religious rituals. This reflected the harmony and dependence they had for the natural world. Animals that migrated between different environments such as land, water, or sky were viewed as mediators or messengers between people and the spirit worlds.

The Mississippians were a culture that viewed fire as a symbol of the sun on earth. A continuous sacred burning fire was kept burning in every village. If the

fire went out, the area was considered polluted. The cedar was spiritually important as well, its wood was used to purify and sanctify burial mounds.

### **Agriculture**

The Mississippian civilization was considered to be **surplus farmers**. This means that they were large scale farmers, who grew enough food to feed their family and have extra crops to trade. They grew their crops and built their farms along the river and in the fertile valleys along the Mississippi. They were the first to grow corn/maize and also grew various crops such as beans, squash, sunflowers, gourds, and barley. This region was rich with resources and provided them with the opportunity for hunting and fishing.



[http://www.watertown.k12.ma.us/cunniff/americanhistorycentral/01firstamericans/The\\_Moundbuild.html](http://www.watertown.k12.ma.us/cunniff/americanhistorycentral/01firstamericans/The_Moundbuild.html)

The ability to grow a variety of crops in surplus allowed for the Mississippian populations to grow. More food equals the ability to feed more people. As the population swelled there was a need for more land and the Mississippian culture began to expand throughout the southeast United States.

**Question: Is it better to be a subsistence farmer or a surplus farmer? Explain.**

### **Trade/Achievements**

Some of the Mississippian cities had populations of 10,000 or more people. Their cities were centered on large, pyramid-shaped platform mounds. They were often topped by temples and the homes of the elite. The largest of the Mississippian cities was called **Cahokia**, located near modern East St. Louis. At its center was a massive mound that was approximately 100 feet high with a base of more than 14 acres. This huge platform mound had a base larger than the Great Pyramid of Egypt. Surrounding this were more than 120 smaller platform

mounds. It is estimated that Cahokia had a greater population than both the great European cities of Paris and London by the year 1250 A.D.



"Cahokia Mounds - The Largest Archeological Site in North America." Legends of America. Web. 18 June 2015.

**Question: How does the layout of Cahokia compare to a Greek city-state?**

**Question: Explain how the Adena/Hopewell and the Mississippians are all classified as "mound builders?"**

Mississippians created decorative, detailed objects from shells, clay, and pipestone. They were also able to trade the surplus food that they grew to other people. Archeological evidence proves that they traded with far away groups, possibly the Maya of the Yucatan, Peninsula in modern day Mexico.

### **Decline**

For reasons that remain a mystery, the Mississippian civilization collapsed at the beginning of the 1300s A.D. Just like the Anasazi, Adena, and the Hopewell cultures, the Mississippians would greatly influence the tribes that came after

them in the region. Their agricultural practices spread throughout the Eastern Woodlands.

## **Summary**

Over time these Native North American Indian groups were replaced by successive groups within their regions. Just like the Anasazi, Adena, Hopewell, and Mississippian cultures that came before them, these new groups adapted to the environment in which they lived and thrived. They were able to modify the culture and achievements of those who came before them and to create their own unique cultural traits.