

Chapter 6: Settlement of the Americas and the Pacific Islands: 6-1b Early Woodland Societies

Book Title: World Civilizations

Printed By: Colin Morris-Moncada (006279659@coyote.csusb.edu)

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6-1b Early Woodland Societies

Between 1000 B.C.E. and 1000 C.E., Native American societies east of the Mississippi River emerged from the Archaic period and improvised novel forms of livelihood that helped give rise to the Neolithic revolution north of the Rio Grande River. Archaeologists call these societies the **Woodland civilizations** ([A collection of closely related Native American civilizations that thrived east of the Mississippi River, c. 1000 B.C.E. to 1000 C.E.](#)). The most important advancement of the *Early Woodland period* (c. 1000–200 B.C.E.) was the gradual cultivation of wild plants as a supplement to hunting and gathering. The incremental transition to agriculture also meant that nomadic lifeways yielded to permanent villages, even though farming did not fully replace hunting and gathering until the *Late Woodland period* ([Chapter 14](#)). The mining and smithing of copper sheets for decoration and trade have their origins in the northeast, but Native North Americans apparently never learned to smelt metals of any kind. Pottery appeared along coastal areas of the American Southeast as early as 2500 B.C.E., but during this period it spread to inland areas along with progressive improvements in decorative techniques and styles.

Serpent Mound

People of the woodlands either cremated or buried their dead in simple mounds, which typically contained the remains of several related individuals. People of the Adena culture also created elaborate animal-shaped mounds, such as the Serpent Mound in Ohio, for reasons that are unclear.



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The best known of these Woodland civilizations was the [Adena culture \(One of the Native American Woodland civilizations that thrived c. 1000 B.C.E.–200 C.E.\)](#) (1000–1 B.C.E.), which was located in a region that now includes Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, New York, and West Virginia. What distinguished the Adena from other Woodland civilizations were their burial practices and pottery styles. They either cremated the dead or covered them under earth mounds; unlike other Woodland peoples, however, the Adena did not include pottery in their funerary arrangements. Stylistically, their pottery was plain or marked with cord or fabric-like motifs.

For food, Early Woodland civilizations like the Adena relied on fauna typical of a forest environment, such as deer, elk, bear, woodchuck, beaver, porcupine, grouse, and turkey, which they augmented with wild grasses, nuts, and berries. As further supplements to this diet, they progressively learned how to cultivate squash, pumpkin, sunflowers, and goosefoot. By the end of this period, too, Woodland peoples replaced the atlatl with the bow and arrow. Bark cloth textiles were used alongside coverings made from animal leather.

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