

Early Indian Cultures

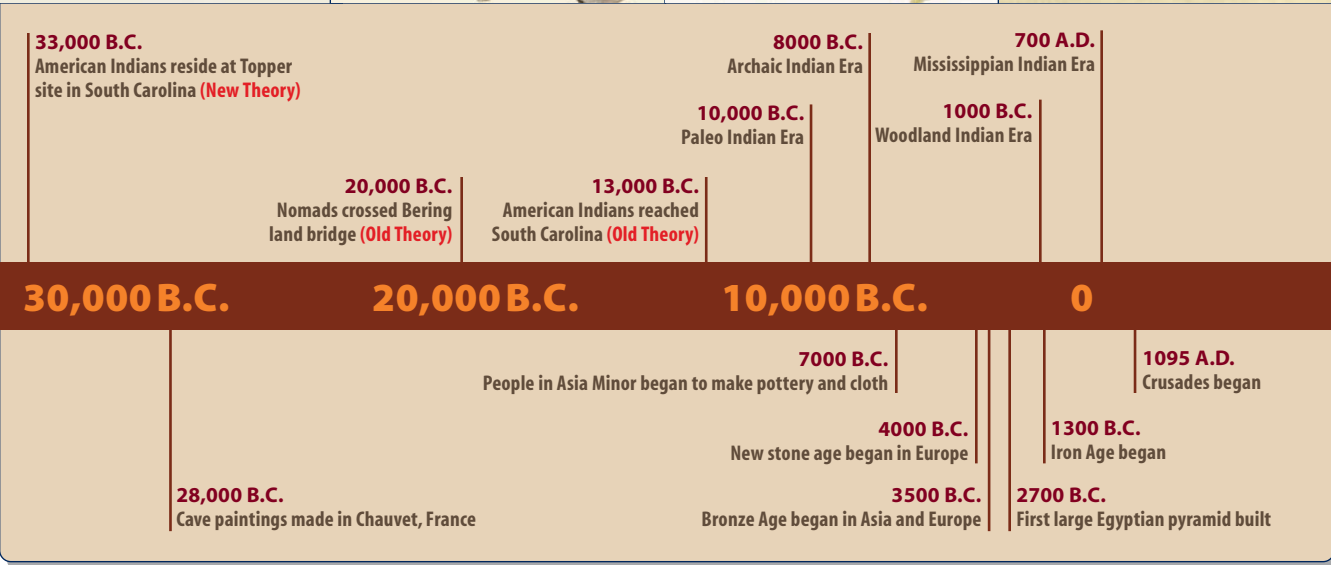
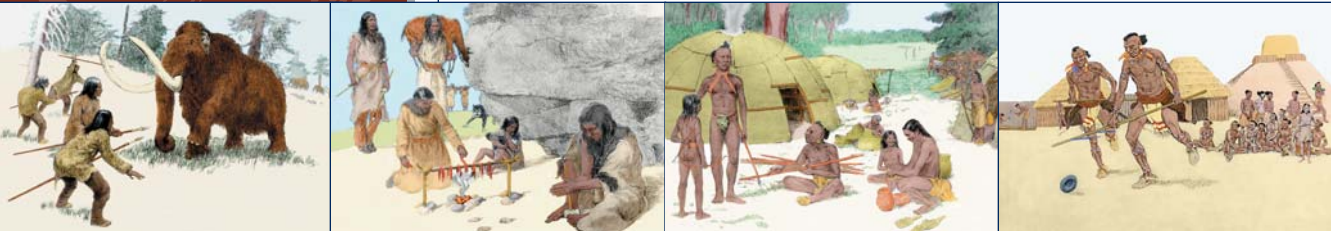
As you read look for:

- how we learn about early people,
- the four prehistoric Indian cultures, and
- vocabulary terms: **prehistory, artifact, anthropologist, archaeologist, migrate, nomad, culture, projectile point, chert, ritual, palisade, and hieroglyphics.**

Figure 7
Timeline
33,000 B.C.–
700 A.D.

Tens of thousands of years ago, people lived on the land we call South Carolina. These people left no written records, but we know they were here because scientists have found their remains. These people lived in the time called **prehistory**, the time before people kept written records.

Most of the early white settlers of South Carolina were farmers. When they prepared their fields for planting, they often uncovered arrowheads,



broken pots, and broken tools. These **artifacts** provided a record of the people who had inhabited the land before the white settlers, but the settlers usually tossed them aside or, if they knew what they had found, they would sell them. Unfortunately, this disturbed the only record we had of the prehistoric people, and a part of history was lost.

Today, there are people whose jobs are to study the remains of these early people. **Anthropologists** study the origin and development of man. They obtain many of the objects they study from **archaeologists**, who search for the artifacts in the ground. Archaeologists *excavate* (dig up) sites where they suspect prehistoric people lived. They also work to preserve the objects they find.

People have studied the prehistory of some areas of the United States for a long time. But the prehistory of South Carolina has been studied for only a short time. During the 1930s, the federal government supported archaeological research in the southeastern states, but no work was done in South Carolina. To correct this situation, the South Carolina legislature established the Department of Archaeology in 1963. The department is now part of the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of South Carolina in Columbia.

Since 1963, archaeologists have excavated many sites in South Carolina. Most of them are along either the coast or one of South Carolina's rivers. Pottery from a prehistoric community was found on Stallings Island in the Savannah River and on Fig Island near the North Edisto River. Excavations on Hilton Head Island and other places have produced more pottery and other objects. Today, because of this research, we have a better understanding of the state's prehistory. Far more questions remain, however, than have been answered.

Prehistoric Cultures

The most popular scientific theory states that the ancestors of the American Indians of South Carolina and the rest of the Western Hemisphere left Siberia in northeastern Asia about 20,000 years ago. At that time, Earth was in the middle of an ice age, and glaciers covered more of the land than they do today. The presence of the glaciers meant there was more dry land. South Carolina's coastline was 55 miles farther east, Florida was twice as wide, and the area that is today the Bering Strait between Alaska and Siberia was



Map 9 Bering Land Bridge

Map Skill: How does the Bering Strait help us understand how some people possibly came to America?

completely dry. The land bridge made it possible for humans to **migrate**, or move, from Siberia into the area we now call Alaska.

These early people migrated to North America following the animals that provided them with food and other essentials. Little is known about these

people because they left very few remains. We know only that they were **nomads** (wanderers) who followed their food supply wherever it went. Over thousands of years, these people spread throughout North and South America and the islands of the Caribbean Sea. Thousands of years later, Columbus called the people he encountered in the New World *Indians*. Those who thought Columbus's error should be corrected called these people *American Indians*.

The American Indians developed many different **cultures**, or ways of life, as they moved and settled in different areas. It took a lot of years for the first American Indians to reach South Carolina. The Indians who migrated to South Carolina lived in

the Coastal Plain and the Piedmont. Their culture was based on hunting the mammoth, mastodon, and great bison living in the area. Scientists call the era, or time period, of the first American Indians the *Pre-Projectile Point Era*. A **projectile point** is a sharpened rock. The period is also called the Clovis era after artifacts found in Clovis, New Mexico. The Clovis period occurred 13,500 years ago and lasted about 600 years.

Recent discoveries by archeologists throughout North and South America have provided evidence that man may have lived on the continents earlier than originally thought. Archeological sites in Peru, South America, and in the states of Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and South Carolina have yielded evidence that humans may have lived in America 40,000 years ago. These earlier inhabitants may have come by boat from Europe. Scientists believe the link is possible because the artifacts found in North America are similar to those found in Spain.

The South Carolina site, Topper, is found in Allendale County along the Savannah River. The site, a chert quarry, has been studied for many years and has provided a lot of evidence supporting the Bering Strait theory. **Chert** is a glassy, flint-like rock useful in making tools. In 1998, however, scientists discovered materials at Topper that predated the Clovis era by 3,000 years. Additional digging at Topper has generated more artifacts that may



Above: This painting depicts early Asians crossing the land bridge between Asia and Alaska during one of the Ice Ages. These are thought to be the ancestors of Native Americans.



be up to 40,000 years old. If the artifacts prove to be even 25,000 years old, scientists and historians will be forced to reconsider the Bering Strait theory.

Paleo Indians

Over the years the American Indians developed better tools and entered a new era, the *Paleo Indian Era*. By this period, American Indians had learned to make and use projectile points that they attached to spears. With the spears, they hunted the large herd animals of North America. Instead of throwing the spears, the American Indians probably jabbed them into trapped animals. The animals then bled to death.

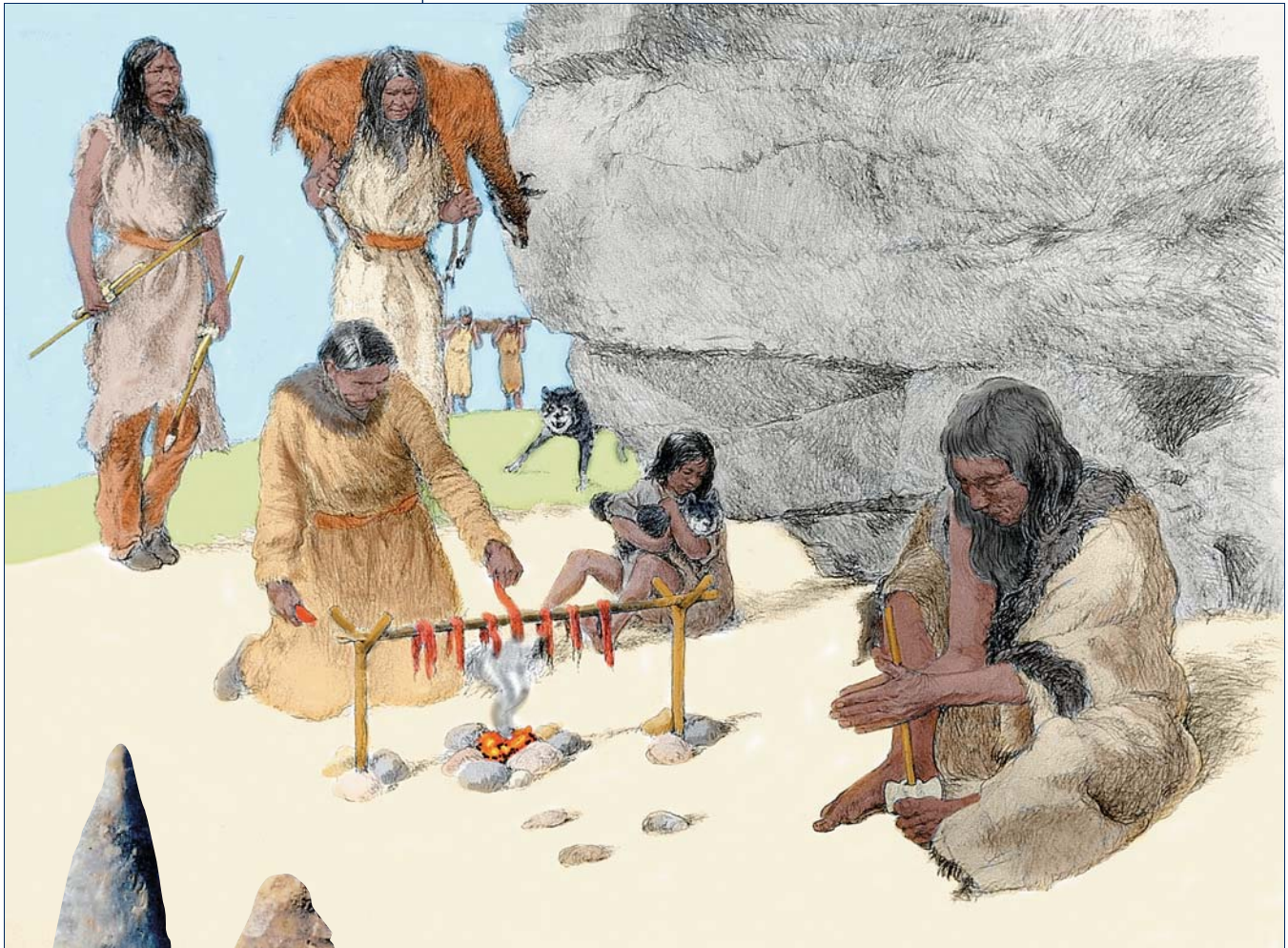
The majority of American Indians who lived in present-day South Carolina most likely entered this area about 12,000 years ago. Excavations along the coast have uncovered stone tools of the period, along with the bones of mammoth, camels, mastodon, and small wild horses. There is evidence that the American Indians of South Carolina gathered certain plants for food in addition to the animals, but they were not farmers.

Did You Know?

The word paleo means "ancient" or "very old."



Above: Using weapons tipped with stone points like these, Paleo Indians killed mammoth and other large animals. Mammoth, large hairy elephants, were native to the New World until about 6000 B.C.



Top: After the large animals died out, the Archaic Indians relied on gathering natural food and hunting smaller animals. **Above:** These smaller spear points were made during the Archaic Indian Era.

Archaic Indians

Over the next two thousand years, several important changes took place in South Carolina. Animals like the mammoth, camel, and wild horse disappeared. The climate and vegetation became more like the present-day climate and vegetation. The American Indians began to adopt a new way of life as their culture became more advanced. They made smaller spear points with notches and stems. They attached those points to spears that they could easily throw. They made fish hooks from bone and developed a grinding bowl, also called a mortar.

A change in diet came with the change in tools and the disappearance of the larger animals. The American Indians of the *Archaic Era*, the period that began about 8000 B.C., ate smaller animals such as raccoon, deer, turkey, squirrel, and duck. They also ate fish, shellfish, turtles, acorns, hickory nuts, walnuts, seeds, and roots. This change in diet allowed the American Indians to become more settled because their food source wandered over a smaller area.

Toward the end of the Archaic Era, about 2000 B.C., the American Indians learned to make pottery. Scientists believe the Indians made some of the

earliest pottery along the Savannah River. Women usually made the pottery, preparing and shaping the clay by hand. After the clay dried, they baked it in an open fire to make it harder. The development of pottery enabled the American Indians to store the food they caught or gathered so they did not have to move as often. It was one step toward the creation of villages.

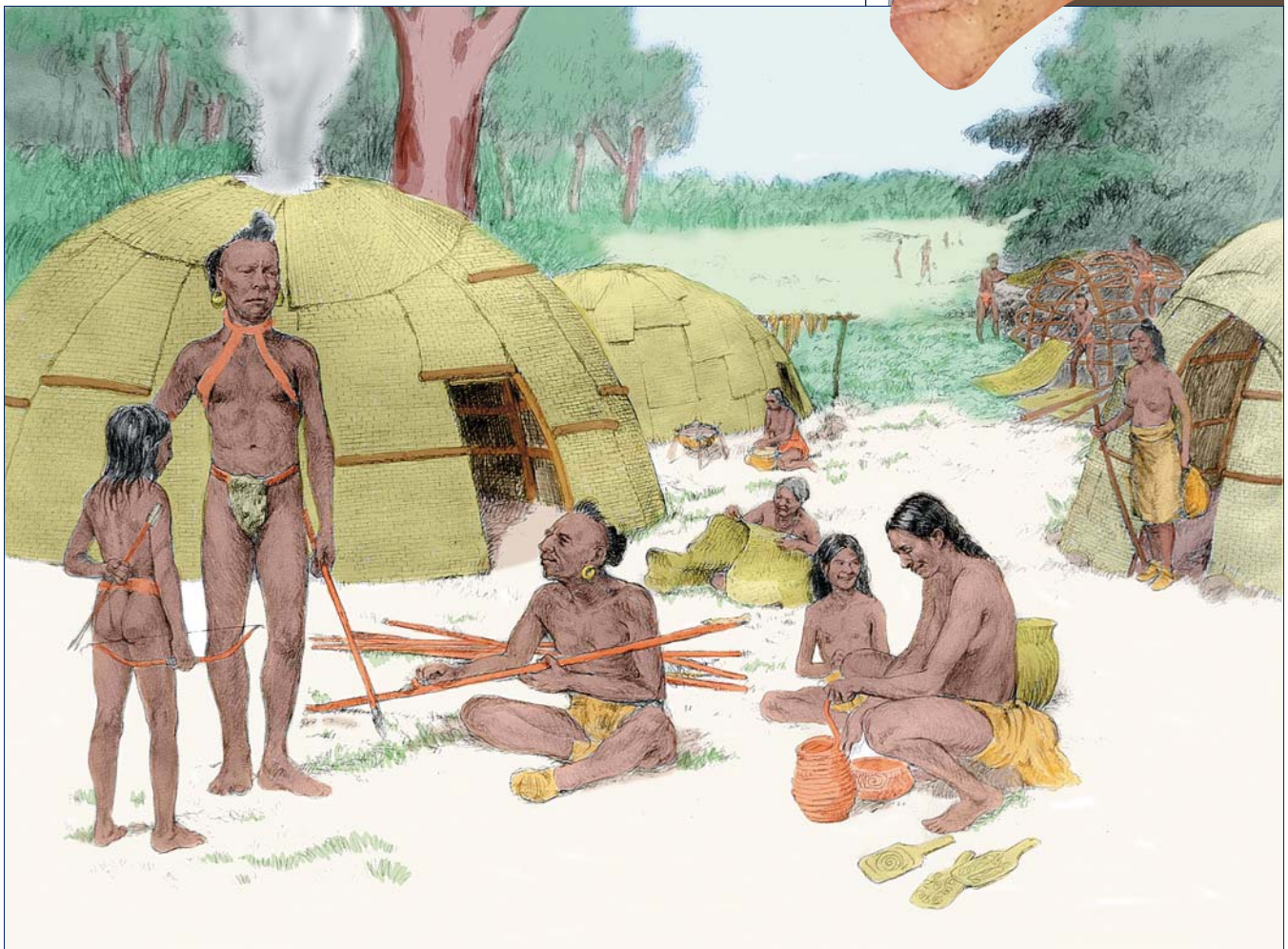
Woodland Indians

Next came the *Woodland Era*. During this era, which began about 1,000 B.C., American Indians began to *domesticate* (tame) plants, practice agriculture, and live in villages. Among their first crops were bottle gourds and squash. By 200 B.C., they had added *maize*, their word for corn. Now that American Indians were farming in addition to hunting and gathering, their population grew. Moving less meant the Indians had more time to do tasks. They began to produce smaller, sharper spear points and to decorate pottery.

Two forms of pottery decoration have been found in South Carolina. North of the Edisto River the American Indians used cords or fabrics to make the impressions in the wet clay. South of the Edisto the American Indians used a wooden paddle to make the impressions.

Below: This is an example of a Woodland spear point.

Bottom: When the Woodland Indians began to cultivate plants, they developed more permanent settlements.



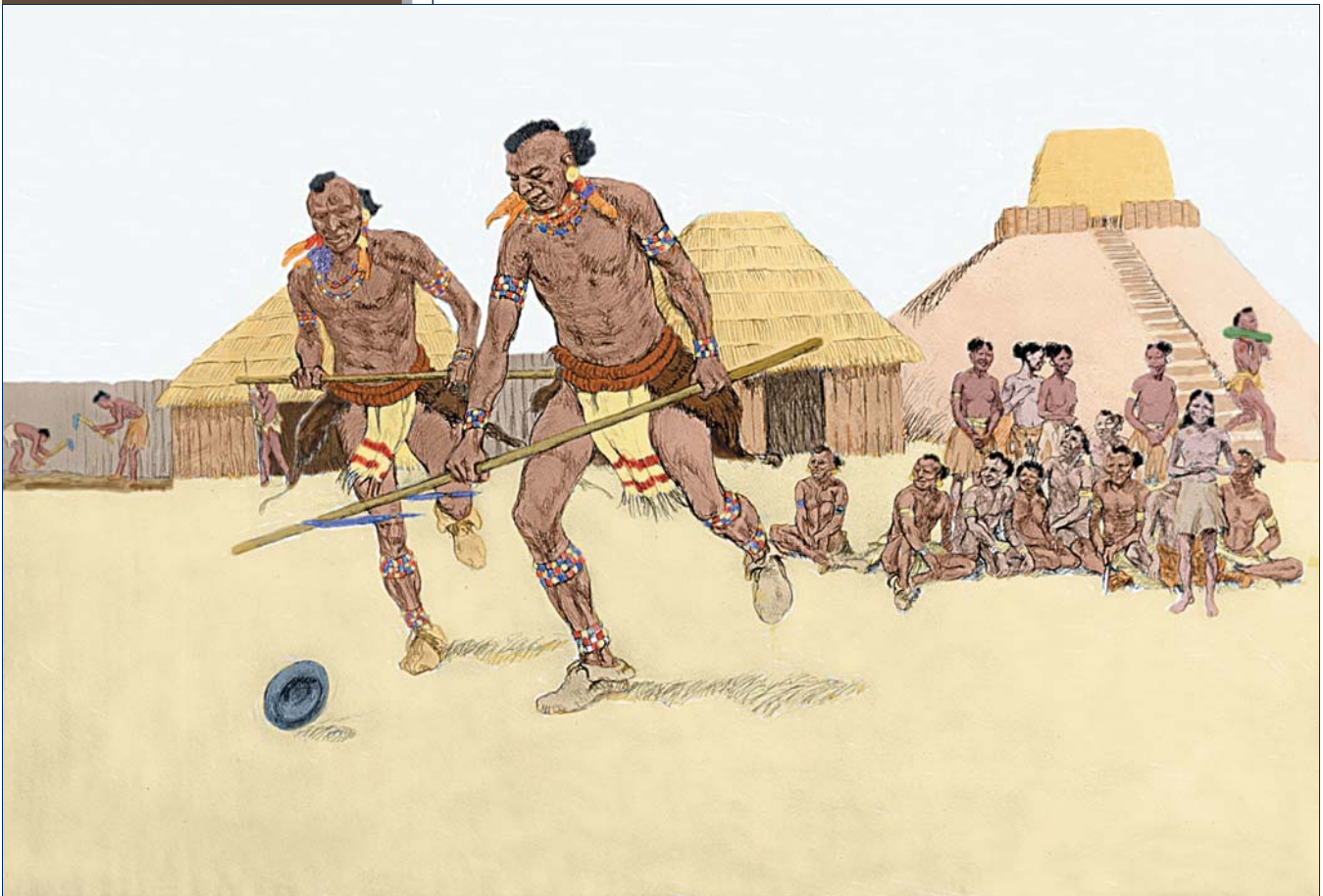
Mississippian Indians

About 700 A.D the American Indians in South Carolina entered the last prehistoric era, the *Mississippian Era*. The Indians of this period farmed more than those of earlier periods. They grew corn, beans, squash, and pumpkins. Villages were common by this period, as were mounds.

The mounds, which could be as high as 100 feet, served two functions. Some were burial places. Located on top of other mounds were public buildings, temples, and the house of the chieftain. Sometimes the Indians cleared an area at the foot of the mound. Here they played games or participated in **rituals**, or ceremonies. Around the mounds were structures made mostly of wood. The entire village was often surrounded by a **palisade**, a fence of pointed stakes that was 12-20 feet high. This fence protected the village from rival tribes. The labor required to build the mounds and the areas around them shows that the American Indians of this period had a highly organized society.

Diaries and travel journals of sixteenth-century Spanish explorers describe the American Indian towns of the Mississippian Era. Copper ornaments and weapons, wooden carvings, picture writing, and hieroglyphics were found throughout the towns. **Hieroglyphics** are pictures or symbols used to represent sounds, words, or ideas. These items were associated with the many

Below: The game being played here is chunky. It was a one-on-one match in which one player rolled a stone called the chunky while the other player threw a pole to hit it.



Discovering South Carolina

Indian Mounds in South Carolina

The American Indians built mounds for a variety of reasons. Some mounds were burial mounds, where the remains of the departed Indians were placed on their way to the afterlife. Some mounds were strictly ceremonial, allowing the Indians to celebrate life, birth, death, victory, and so on. Other mounds were part of the fortifications of the Indian village. And some mounds were part of a building. Regardless of their purpose, today the mounds hold archaeological treasures for historians and archaeologists alike.

Undoubtedly, many mounds in the state were destroyed as civilization spread and land was needed for agriculture, transportation projects, and urban growth. Today, there are four major Indian mounds in South Carolina. The first mound is Sewee Shell Ring, nicknamed the “Spanish fort.” This mound is located on the southeastern edge of the Francis Marion Forest in Charleston County and is one of the northernmost shell rings. *Shell rings* are made from sea shells accumulated by Indian villages over a long period of time. Sewee Shell Ring was partially destroyed when shells were removed to pave roads. Today, the ring is no more than 10 feet high and measures over 100 feet across. Trees and shrubs cover the ring, preserving its shape.

The second Indian mound is Spanish Mount, also located in Charleston County in Edisto State Park. It is composed primarily of oyster shells and rises to a height of about 8 feet. Spanish Mount is estimated to be 4,000 years old. Although small trees and dense shrubs protect part of the mound, it is beginning to erode due to ocean tides and the current in freshwater Scott Creek. Another mound, Sea Pines Shell Ring,



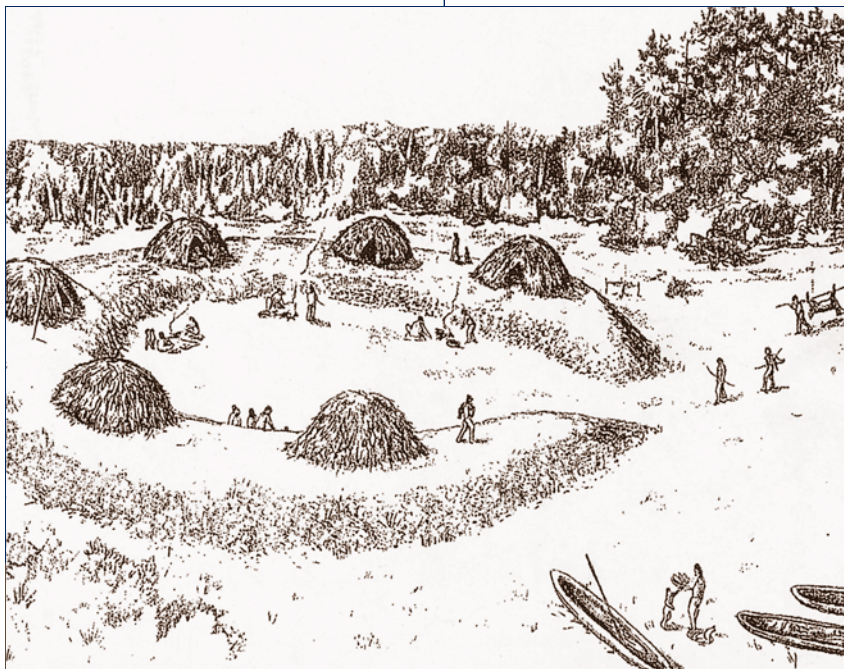
Above: Shell mounds are also called “middens.” This shell mound, located on one of the sea islands, is the largest in South Carolina.

is located on the southern part of Hilton Head Island in the Sea Pines Plantation Forest Reserve. This ring is also made primarily of oyster shells and is about 150 feet in diameter and 3 feet high. Sea Pines Shell Ring is about 3,500 years old.

The fourth mound is Fort Watson Mound, found in Clarendon County in the Santee National Wildlife Refuge. This mound is a late Mississippian platform mound. Often, temples or other buildings of importance were built on top of platform mounds. During the American Revolution, British forces used Fort Watson Mound as a stockade. In mid-April 1781, patriots under the command of Francis Marion surrounded the mound and forced the British to surrender. Today, the mound is covered with trees and shrubs.

ceremonies of the Indians. They also indicate that the Mississippian culture was one of the most highly developed civilizations north of Mexico.

Travel journals also describe a specific social and political order in each tribe or group. Contrary to common belief, women held high status in Indian society, probably because their economic role in the tribe was so important. In fact, many tribes structured families around the mother's side. Women were responsible for raising the crops, preparing food, and maintaining the necessities in each family. Women sometimes held the position of chief, though most chiefs were men. According to an explorer writing in 1540, the American Indian town of Cofitachequi on the South Carolina side of the Savannah River was ruled by a woman.



Above: Most of the mounds in South Carolina are shell mounds. The mounds were formed over many years as the Indians ate the abundant shellfish of the area and then discarded the shells.

After a little time the cacica [chief] came out of the town, seated in a chair, which some principal men having borne to the bank, she entered a canoe. Over the stern was spread an awning, and in the bottom lay extended a mat where [there] were two cushions, one above the other, upon which she sat; and she was accompanied by her chief men, in other canoes, with Indians.

Explorers also recorded that Cofitachequi was very rich compared to other villages. It had a large trade network that reached into the Coastal Plain. The village's storehouses were full of large quantities of clothing, deerskins, shoes, pearls, and figures made from pearls. Cofitachequi was an exception, however, for other towns had no trade network and only a small amount of food.

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It's Your Turn

1. To what does the term *prehistoric* refer?
2. Why did the nomads not stay in one place?
3. In what cultural era were the American Indians when the first Europeans arrived?