The Mississippians or Mound Builders

The Mississippians evolved from the Woodland peoples, but were much more advanced than the tribes before them. They lived in Wisconsin for more than 2,400 years. Mississippians established their villages along the Mississippi River, which is where archaeologists derived their name from. Archaeologist believe that Mississippians lived from 800 A.D to the 1500-1600s during the European arrivals.

The largest Mississippian civilizations were Aztalan in Wisconsin and Cahokia in Illinois. People traveled back and forth between the two cities on canoes easily because many rivers connected the two sites. Unlike Paleo and Archaic Indians, Mississippians were not nomadic and lived in their villages year round. Many of their villages were surrounded by walls like the ancient Aztec to protect them from intruders. There was a social hierarchy within the Mississippian society. This means that each person had an important role, some roles being more valued and important than others. All tribe members reported to their leaders or chiefs who lived on the top of the mounds.

Mississippians were also skilled hunters, craftsmen, builders, potters, and farmers. They hunted small forest animals like deer and rabbits and fished, similar to Archaic Indians. However, Mississippians established a very well organized farming system and created new tools to cultivate their crops. They were the first prehistoric people to domestic crops. Domesticate means to make fit for growth or human use.

Mississippians used the same tools as other prehistoric natives, but either made more advanced versions of them or created new tools. For example, they created the bow and arrow, knives from obsidian (black hard rock found deep in the ground), and spears from new kinds of rock to make them more efficient in killing their prey.

They are also known for their craftsmanship. These prehistoric Indians wove beautiful mats, carved figures from bones, wood, and metal, and are famous for their pottery, copper tools, and leather clothing. Mississippians would find copper and melt and pound it out to create figures, new tools, or use it for trading purposes.

Mississippians built their homes with wood posts that were spaced a part and covered with mud. Houses were then covered with grass, bark, skins, and mats with typically thatch roofing. These homes were normally had a dome or rectangular shape with an entrance on one-side. A fire pit was dug in the middle for heat and cooking. They are commonly referred to as “Wattle & Daub” homes.

They are most known for the mounds they built. Mississippians spent hundreds of years building mounds, which were huge, steep platforms made from packed dirt. Archaeologists believe that the mounds served as ceremonial and burial sites. Some mounds are only a few feet tall and wide while others are over four football fields in length and width!!! In Wisconsin at Aztalan, archaeologists found three large, flat-topped temple mounds, which is now a national park.