



FIRST SOUTH CAROLINIANS

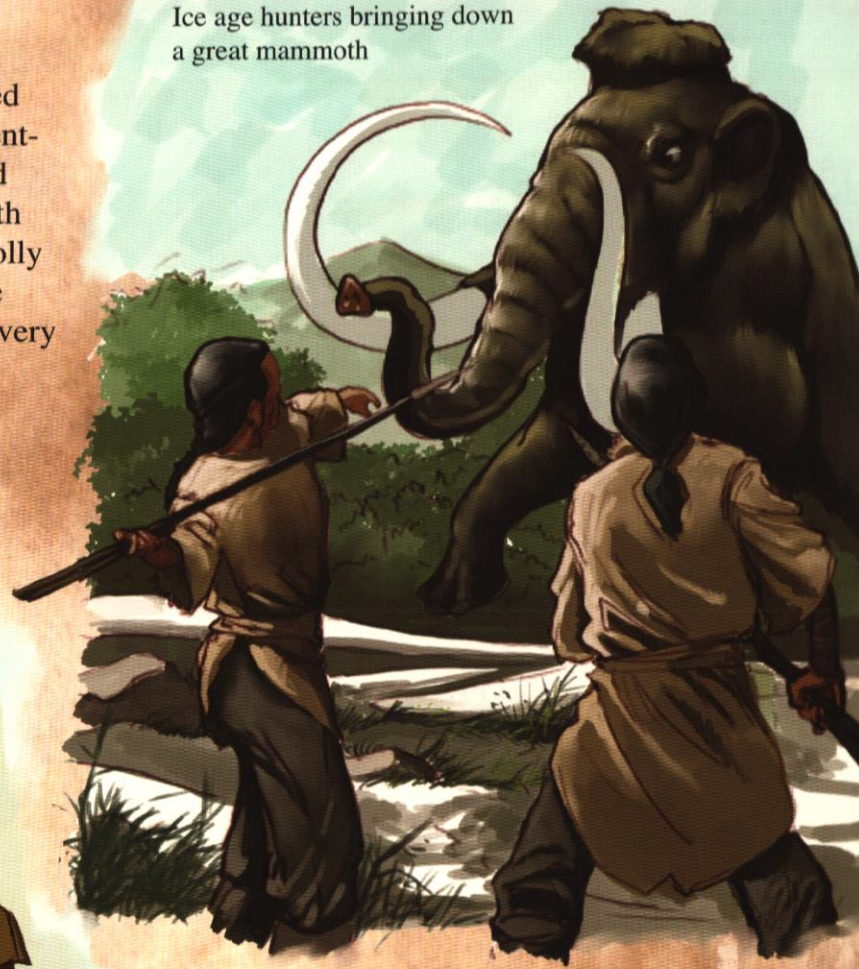
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Illustrated by James H. Palmer Jr.

People have been living on the North American continent for about 40,000 years.

Scholars believe that the first people migrated across a thick layer of ice from Asia to present-day Alaska. After crossing this Ice Age “land bridge” many people continued heading south and southeast, hunting game such as the woolly mammoth along the way. These early people were nomadic; they didn’t stay in one place very long, always moving in search of food.

Ice age hunters bringing down a great mammoth



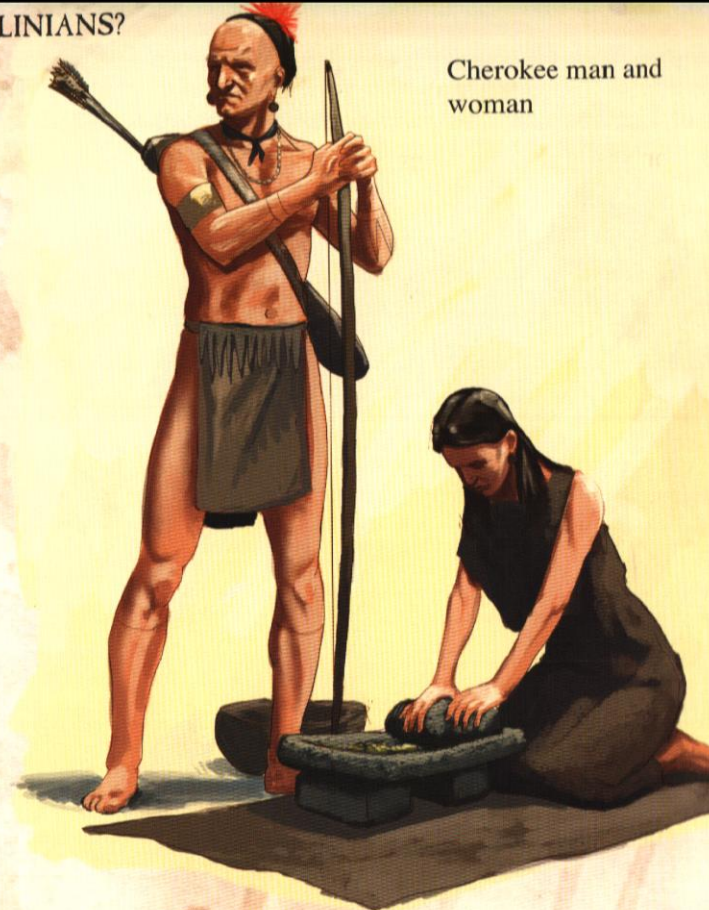
As the earth grew warmer and the ice began to melt, the great herds of mammoth began to disappear. People continued heading south, many settling in what is now the state of South Carolina. They began to hunt smaller game, such as deer, bear and other small animals. They also gathered nuts and other plants to eat. This led to basic farming and cultivating of crops.

Archaic Indian family

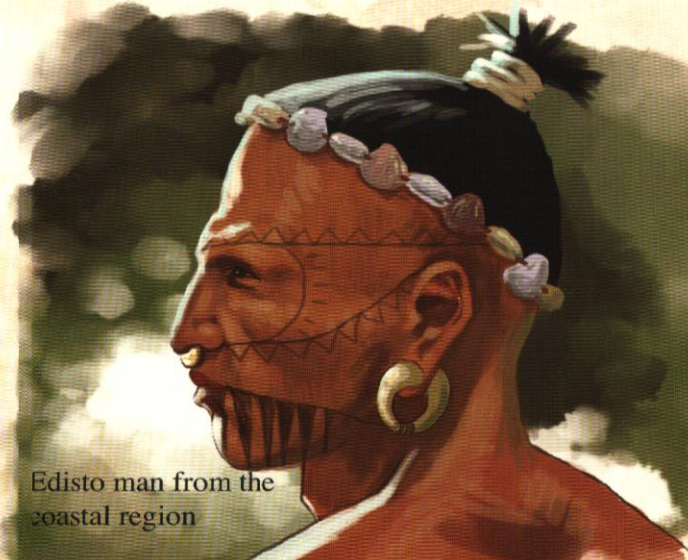
HOW DO WE KNOW ABOUT NATIVE SOUTH CAROLINIANS?

Most of what we know about how the early native people of South Carolina lived comes from Europeans who first made contact with them more than 500 years ago. This is the period of First Contact. While the European explorers did, in fact, treat the early Native Americans very badly, they provided a written account of the customs, living habits, and general appearance of the people they found.

Explorers described the native people as “well-proportioned (well-formed) and handsome” with reddish-brown skin color. The Europeans reported that the natives had great strength and endurance without appearing very muscular. Most of the men were tall, around six feet (the Cherokee were the tallest), with dark hair and piercing eyes. No facial hair or beards were observed, and some tribes wore only a tuft of hair on the crown of the head, with the other hair shaved off or torn out by the roots (a Cherokee practice).



Cherokee man and woman



Edisto man from the coastal region

Some tribes, especially along the coast, wore headbands with shells or feathers attached. They also practiced tattooing of their bodies.

The women and some men of the coastal tribes wore necklaces made of shells. Men wore a band tied around their hips, which supported a length of cloth or deerskin draped between their legs, the ends of the garment falling in flaps in front and back. Women often wore clothes made of deerskin. In the Coastal Plain region, some added Spanish moss as clothing. Most native people wore deer moccasins, but many went without shoes of any kind.



Woodland Period pottery
with fish and oysters

During what is known as the *Woodland Period*, the early people of South Carolina established more permanent villages. It was during this time that people first began to make and fire pottery to use in cooking and in carrying water and other materials.

Fish and oysters were a major source of food for the early native people who settled along the coastal rivers and streams of South Carolina during the Woodland period.

Later, about 1,200 years ago, during what is known as the *Mississippian Period*, settlements in South Carolina grew more permanent and became villages. There were great advancements in agriculture during this time as well. People cultivated crops such as corn, squash, beans, peas, melons and other seed-bearing plants. One interesting feature of this period is the practice of mound building. The large mounds varied in shape and sometimes had houses or other structures on top. The people also conducted various ceremonies on top of the mounds.

The first Mississippian settlements in South Carolina appeared along the Savannah River. Eventually, people settled farther inland, mostly on bluffs or hills overlooking streams.

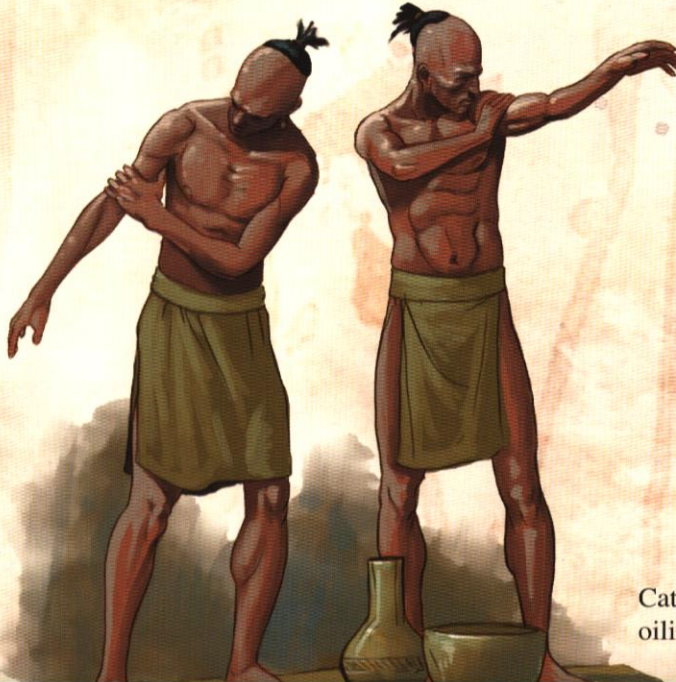
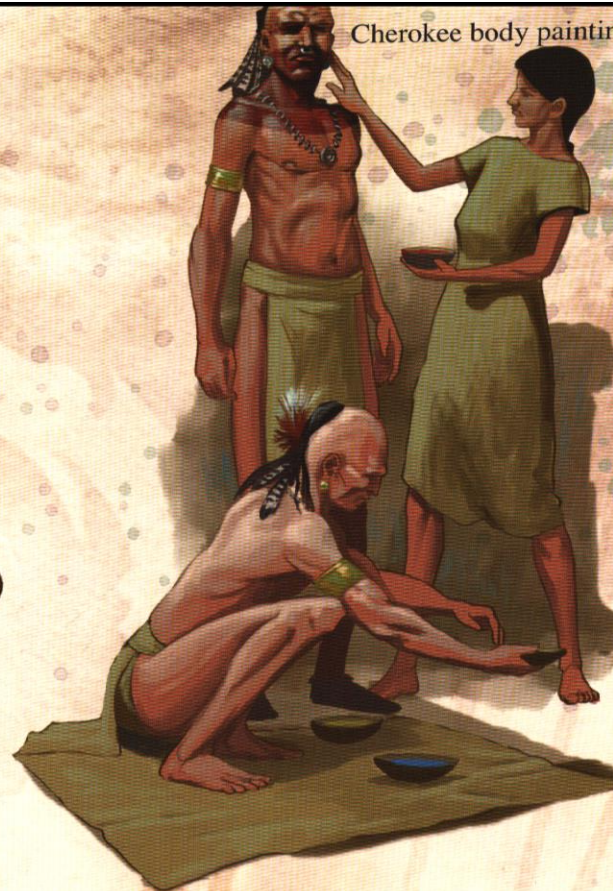


A Mississippian
mound and warrior

Body painting was a very important part of tribal life for many native people. It was often used on special occasions, such as before going into battle or before playing games.

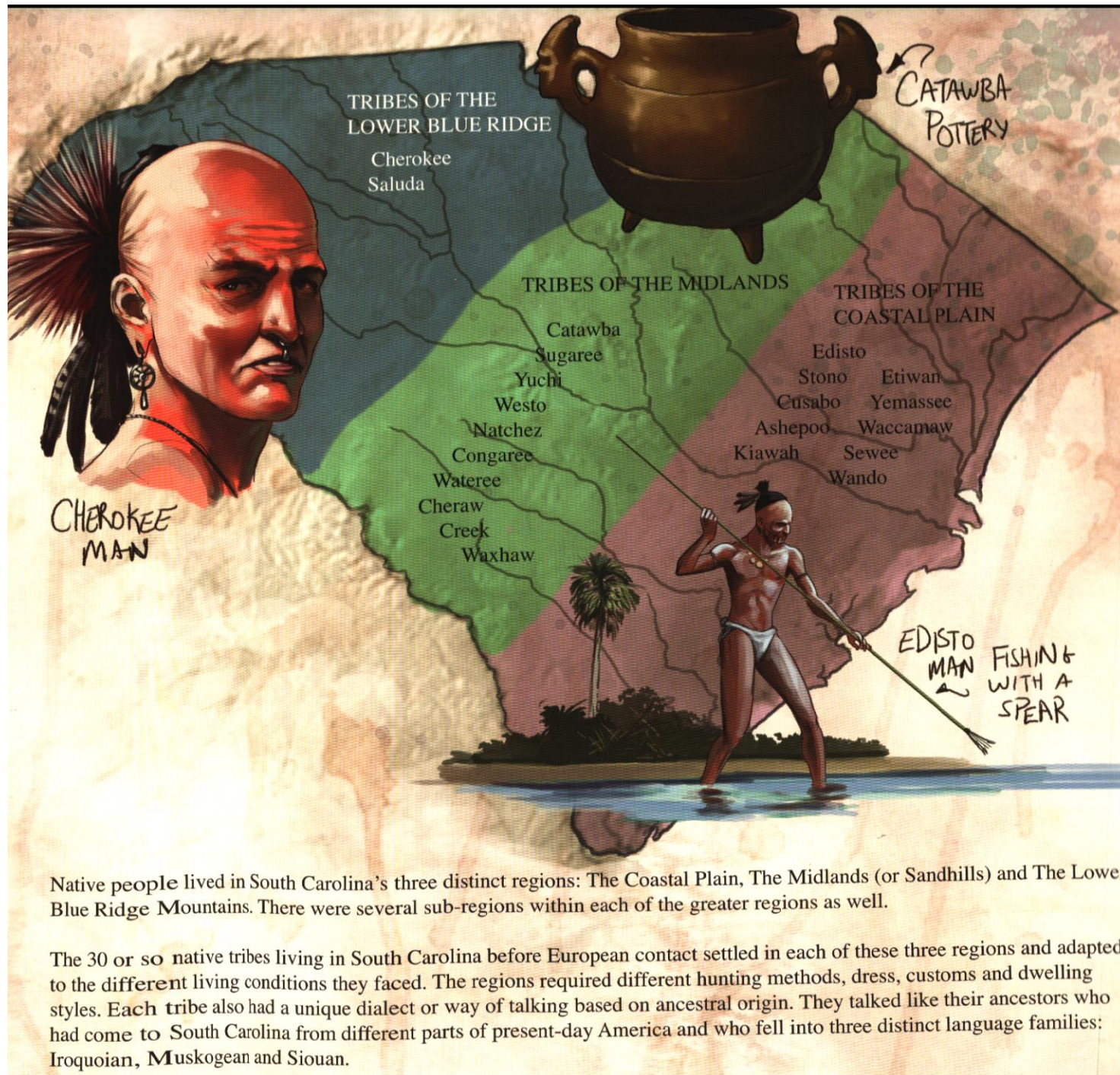


Cherokee body painting



The native people valued personal cleanliness. Living near water gave them the opportunity to bathe every day. After bathing, they rubbed oil (the Cherokee made this from bear grease) onto their skin and hair. Europeans reported that the oil made their skin supple or soft and made their long hair shine. The oil also may have served as an insect repellent.

Catawba men bathing and oiling their bodies



Native people lived in South Carolina's three distinct regions: The Coastal Plain, The Midlands (or Sandhills) and The Lower Blue Ridge Mountains. There were several sub-regions within each of the greater regions as well.

The 30 or so native tribes living in South Carolina before European contact settled in each of these three regions and adapted to the different living conditions they faced. The regions required different hunting methods, dress, customs and dwelling styles. Each tribe also had a unique dialect or way of talking based on ancestral origin. They talked like their ancestors who had come to South Carolina from different parts of present-day America and who fell into three distinct language families: Iroquoian, Muskogean and Siouan.

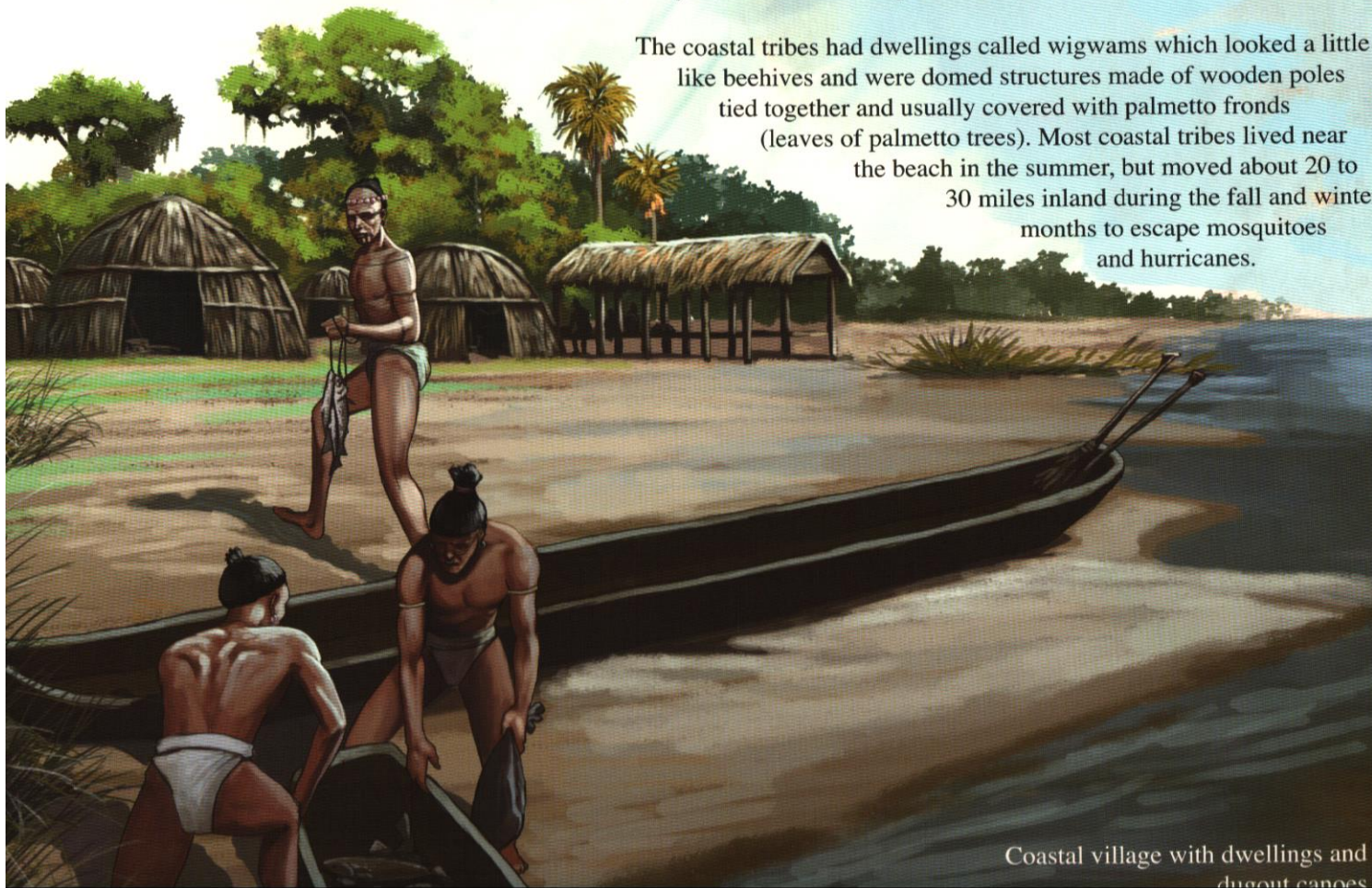
PEOPLE OF THE COASTAL REGION

The coastal tribes of native people lived in the Coastal Plain, a region that spans from the Atlantic coast to about 50 miles inland. This region is almost flat with dark fertile soils and slow-moving streams of black water colored by chemicals called tannins from decaying leaves. Trees in the region were primarily pine, live oak, tupelo and cypress.

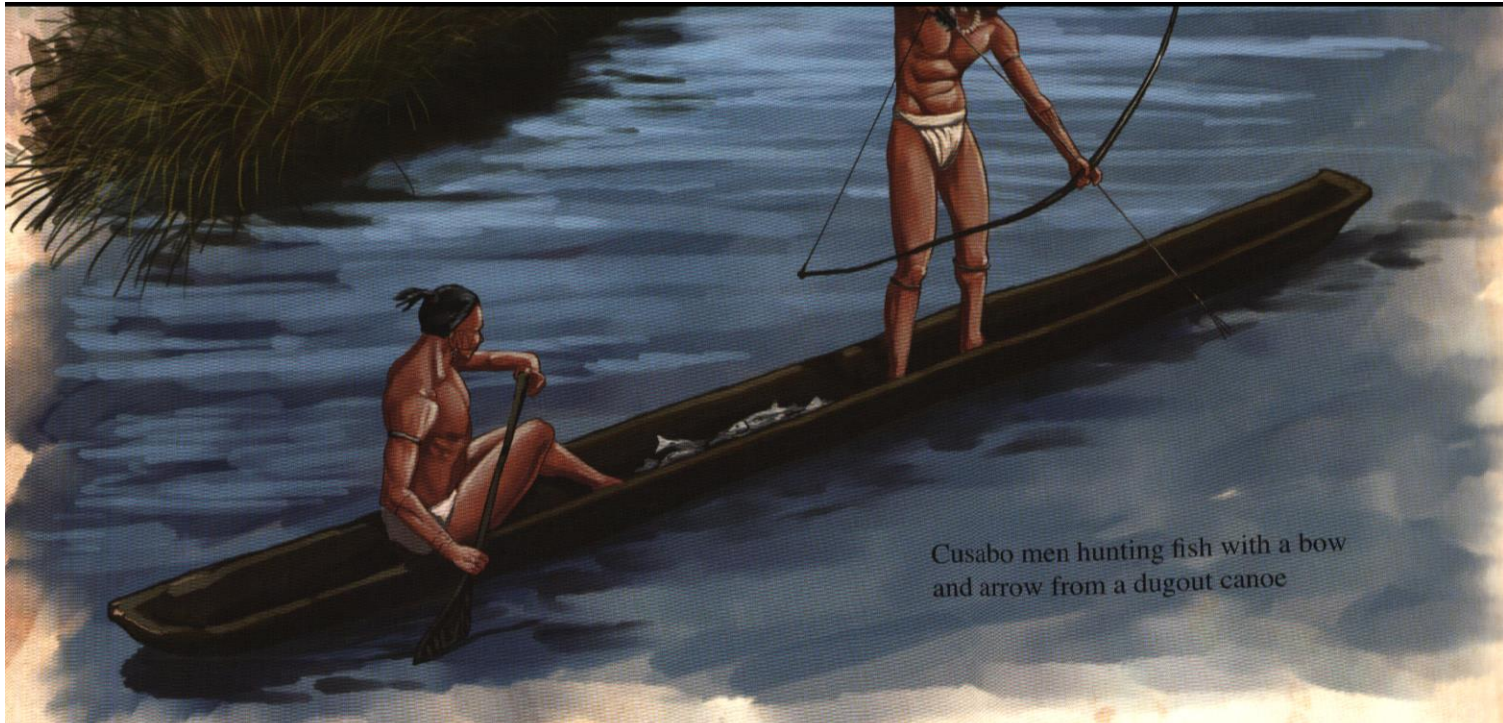
The native people that lived between present-day Savannah and Charleston were collectively called Cusabos, and are thought to be of the Muskogean language family. These people likely arrived in South Carolina from present-day Georgia, Alabama and Florida. Examples of these tribes were the Kiawah, Edisto, Escamacu, Etiwan, Wimbee, Coosa, Stono, Ashepoo, Combahee and Yemassee.

Other tribes north of present-day Charleston are thought by scholars to have ancestors from the American Great Plains, and their language family was Siouan. Examples of tribes living in this subregion of the Coastal Plain were the Sewee, Santee, Pee Dee, Waccamaw, Winyah, Wando and Sampit.

The coastal tribes had dwellings called wigwams which looked a little like beehives and were domed structures made of wooden poles tied together and usually covered with palmetto fronds (leaves of palmetto trees). Most coastal tribes lived near the beach in the summer, but moved about 20 to 30 miles inland during the fall and winter months to escape mosquitoes and hurricanes.

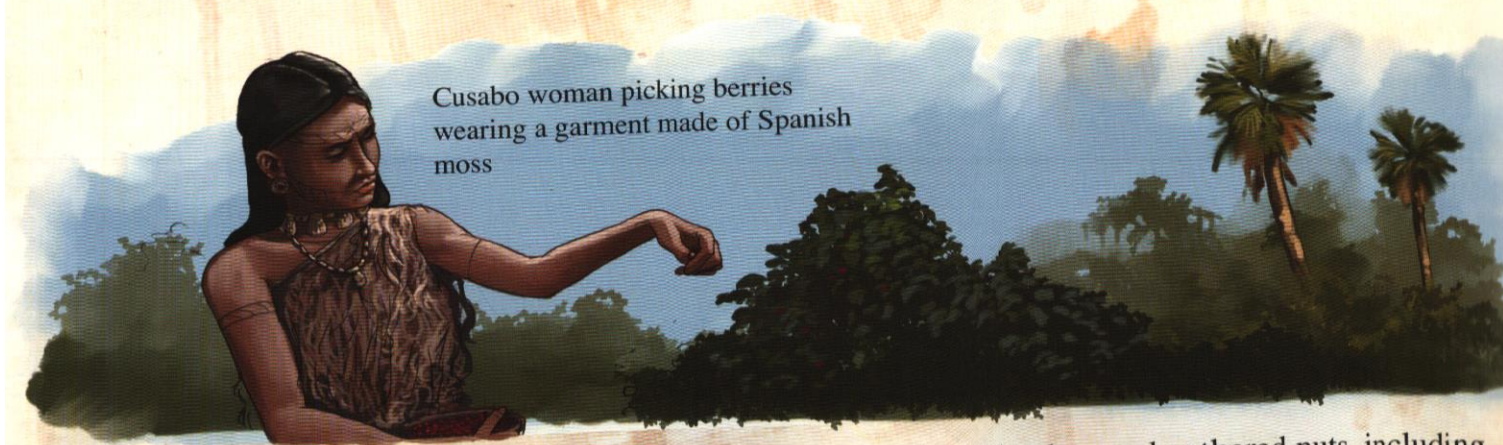


Coastal village with dwellings and dugout canoes.



Cusabo men hunting fish with a bow and arrow from a dugout canoe

Their summer life on the coast consisted of fishing and gathering food from the sea, such as oysters, clams, crabs and shrimp.

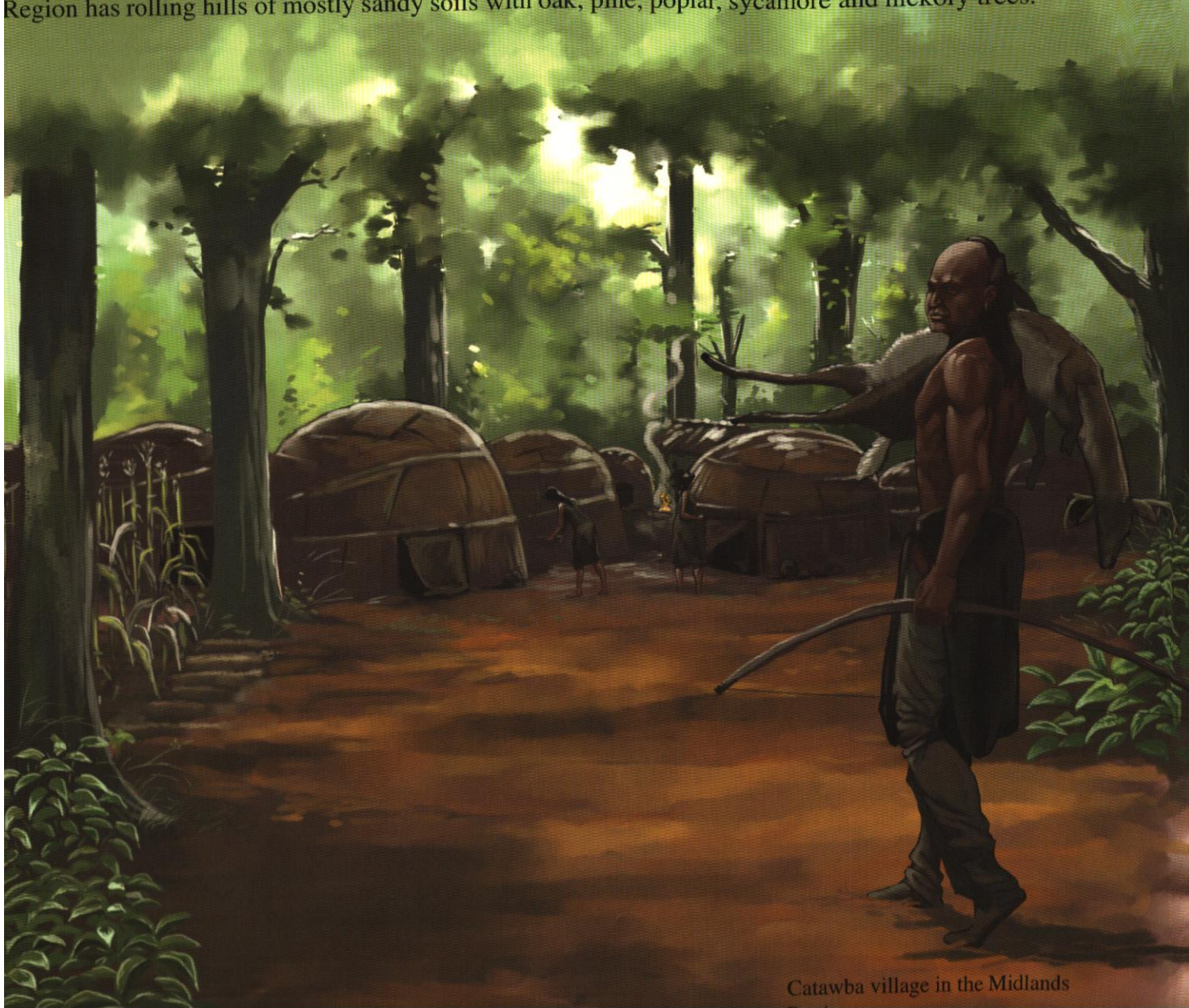


Cusabo woman picking berries wearing a garment made of Spanish moss

In the fall and winter the coastal tribes hunted animals such as deer and turkey and gathered nuts, including acorns.

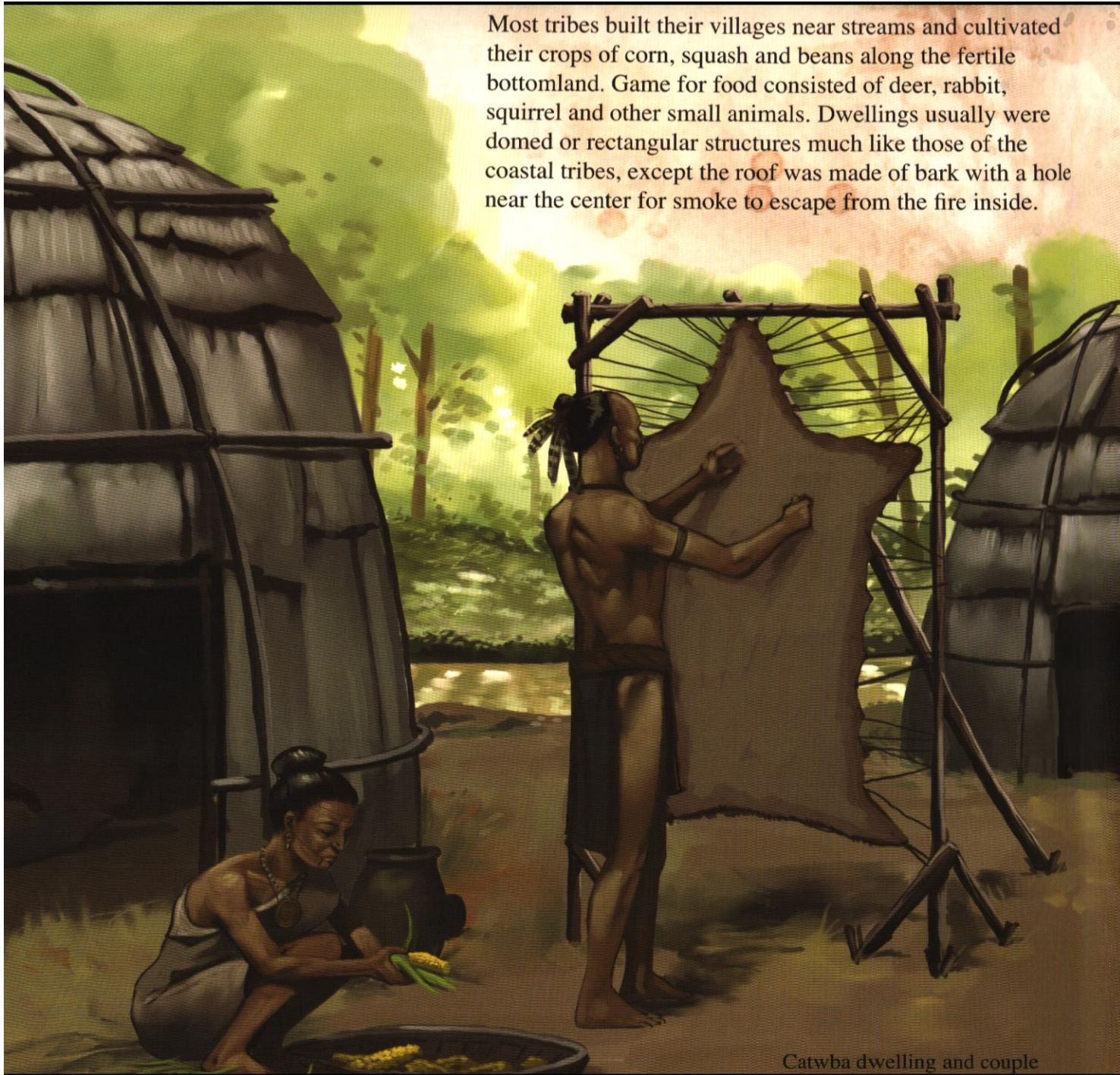
PEOPLE OF THE MIDLANDS REGION

Tribes that lived farther inland in the Midlands Region include Catawba, Cheraw, Congaree, Wateree, Waxhaw and Sugaree. These tribes were known for their farming abilities and great endurance in battle. The Midlands Region has rolling hills of mostly sandy soils with oak, pine, poplar, sycamore and hickory trees.

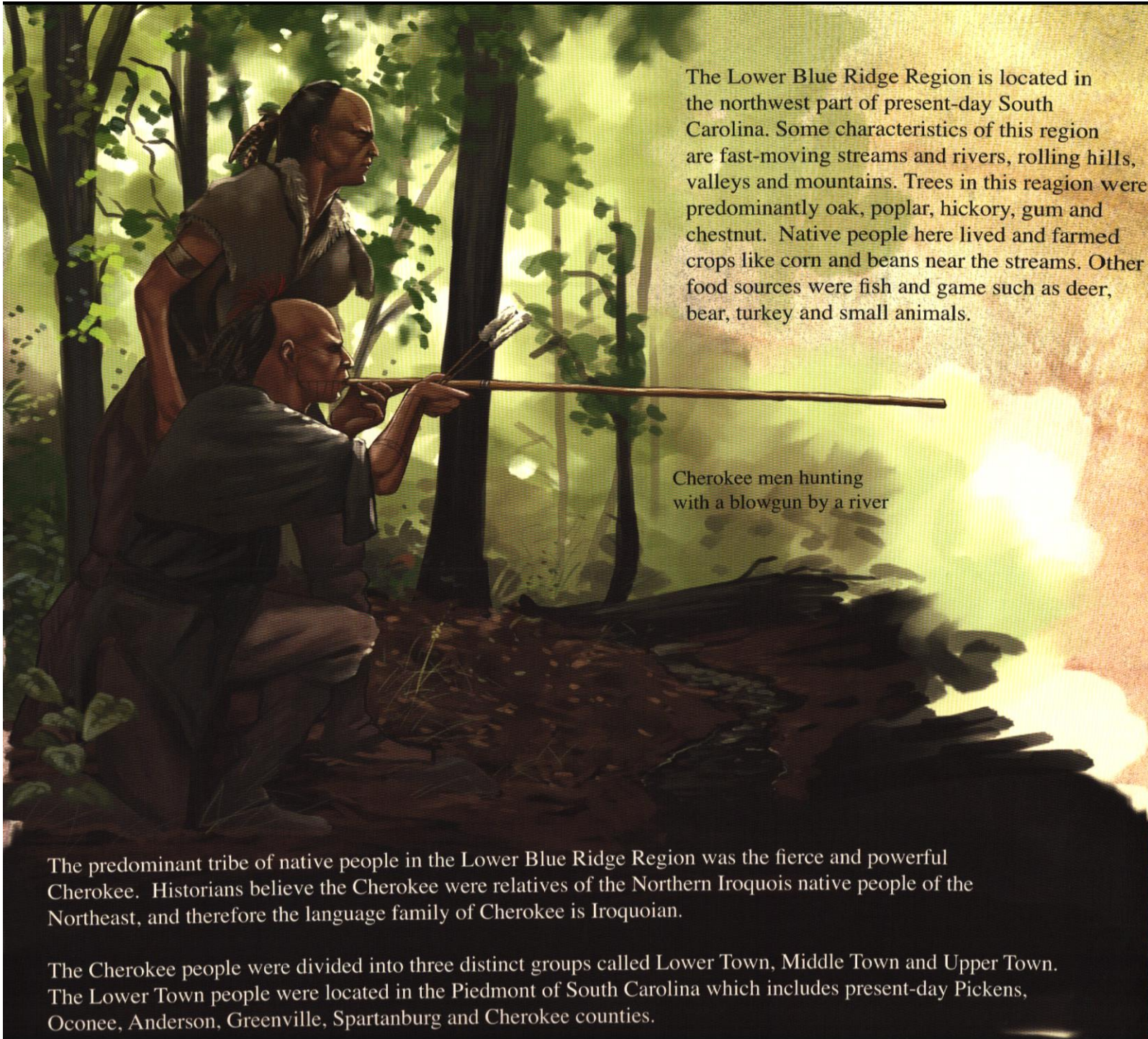


Catawba village in the Midlands

Most tribes built their villages near streams and cultivated their crops of corn, squash and beans along the fertile bottomland. Game for food consisted of deer, rabbit, squirrel and other small animals. Dwellings usually were domed or rectangular structures much like those of the coastal tribes, except the roof was made of bark with a hole near the center for smoke to escape from the fire inside.



Catwba dwelling and couple



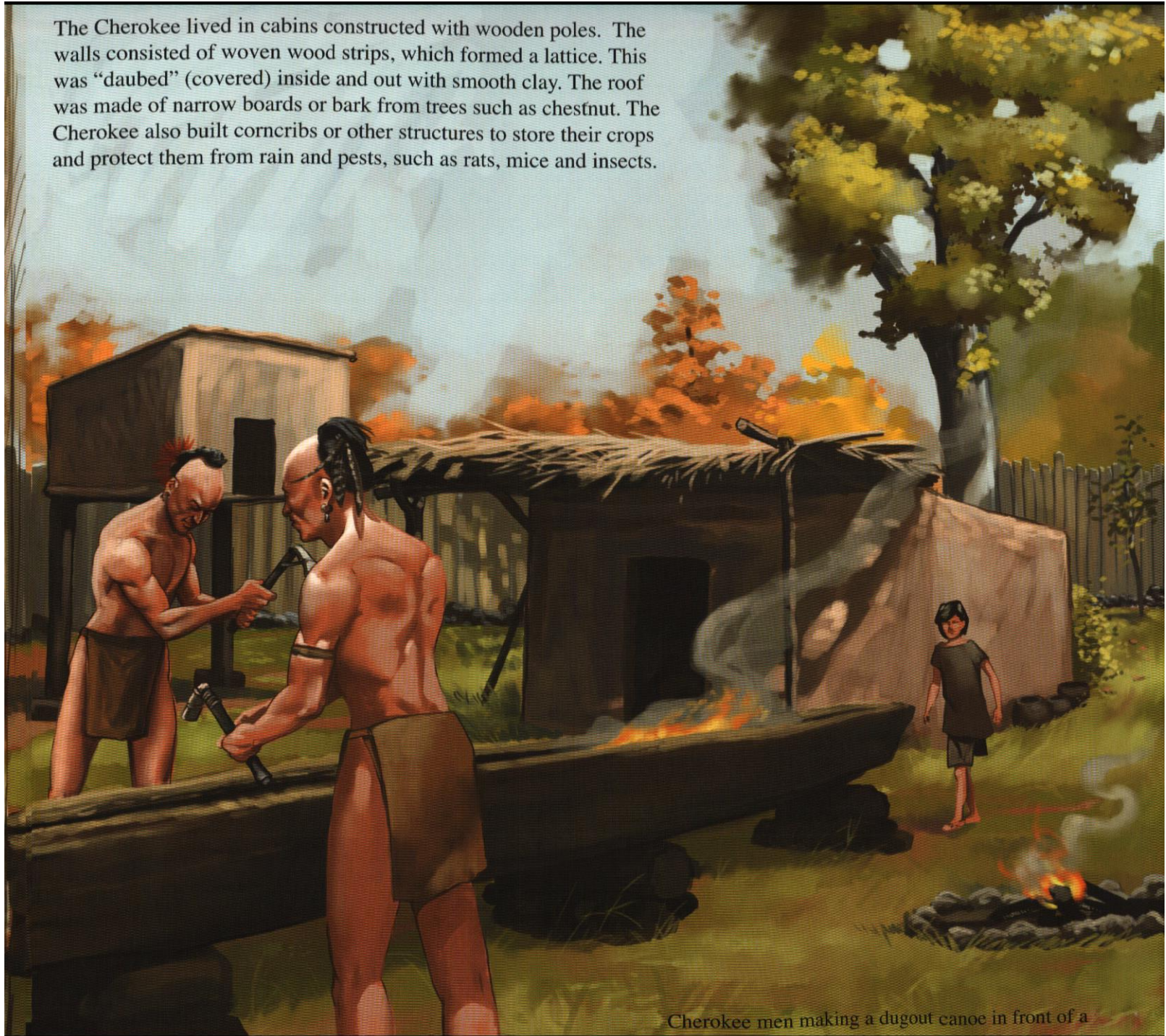
The Lower Blue Ridge Region is located in the northwest part of present-day South Carolina. Some characteristics of this region are fast-moving streams and rivers, rolling hills, valleys and mountains. Trees in this region were predominantly oak, poplar, hickory, gum and chestnut. Native people here lived and farmed crops like corn and beans near the streams. Other food sources were fish and game such as deer, bear, turkey and small animals.

Cherokee men hunting with a blowgun by a river

The predominant tribe of native people in the Lower Blue Ridge Region was the fierce and powerful Cherokee. Historians believe the Cherokee were relatives of the Northern Iroquois native people of the Northeast, and therefore the language family of Cherokee is Iroquoian.

The Cherokee people were divided into three distinct groups called Lower Town, Middle Town and Upper Town. The Lower Town people were located in the Piedmont of South Carolina which includes present-day Pickens, Oconee, Anderson, Greenville, Spartanburg and Cherokee counties.

The Cherokee lived in cabins constructed with wooden poles. The walls consisted of woven wood strips, which formed a lattice. This was “daubed” (covered) inside and out with smooth clay. The roof was made of narrow boards or bark from trees such as chestnut. The Cherokee also built corncribs or other structures to store their crops and protect them from rain and pests, such as rats, mice and insects.



Cherokee men making a dugout canoe in front of a

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Most tribes in the low country had Kings, or Caciques. Some of the coastal tribes had women chiefs, called Queens. Other tribes had chiefs. Their role in society was primarily ceremonial, and they mainly governed by public opinion. Much like today's small towns, almost all personal interactions among individuals were public knowledge.



Cherokee family



Cherokee Chief

Whenever fights broke out and there were injuries or deaths, people often sought revenge. The chief and village elders (similar to current-day town council) tried hard to keep peace and prevent a quarrel from spreading. Native people who committed offenses suffered disapproval or were shunned by the village.

In most tribes the women did most of the field work, including planting, cultivating and harvesting crops for food. The men hunted or prepared for playing games, conducting ceremonies or going into battle. Families consisted of a father and mother and usually only one or two children.

COUNCIL OR TOWN HOUSE

Every tribe had a large central gathering place in the center of the village called the Council or Town House. It is comparable to today's City Hall or County Court House. Inside the Council House it was dark except for light from a fire, surrounded by rows of seats raised like an amphitheater.

In a Cherokee Council House, men sat around smoking pipes and discussing village business while women moved to and from the fields outside with baskets of vegetables or carrying water from the stream.



Men gathered inside a Council House smoking and talking



Native people believed in communication with the spirits of the animal and plant world. For example, when a man killed a wild animal or caught a fish, he asked its spirit to pardon him. He didn't want the spirits to deny him good hunting or fishing in the future. The people believed that every living thing has a spirit and all things are important for balance and harmony in the natural world.



Cherokee shaman praying over a dead man

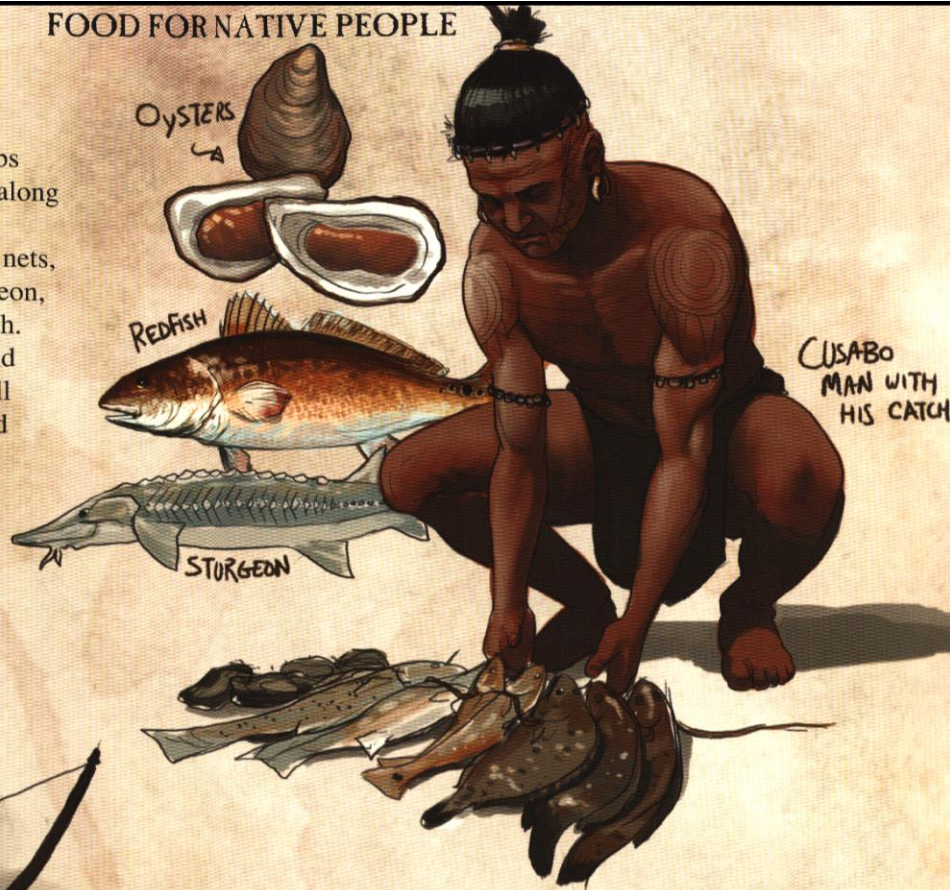
Cherokee hunters with a black bear

The sun, the moon, fire and water formed an important basis of the religious beliefs of native people. The Cherokee, for example, prayed to the sun to bring abundant crops and good health. They believed that fire had been appointed by the sun and moon to take care of the people. Most native people believed in an afterlife where those who behaved well went to light and pleasant place.

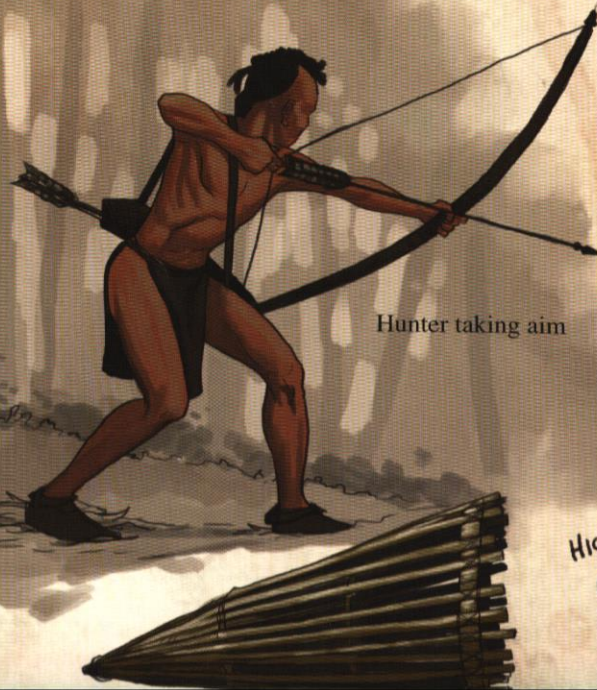
The medicine man or shaman was the religious leader of the village, and was like a preacher or minister since he communicated the relationships between the physical and spiritual aspects of native life and culture. Medicine men knew about plants that were used to cure sickness. Sometimes the religious leader and the medicine man were two different people. The Cherokee used a plant called snakeroot to cure snakebites and "nervousness," and a dark tea made from sassafras roots to cure digestive problems and headaches.

FOOD FOR NATIVE PEOPLE

Food for the coastal tribes consisted of seafood like oysters, clams, shrimp, crabs and fish during the spring and summer, along with corn, vegetables and melons. The people were expert fishermen, and used nets, traps or bows to spear fish such as sturgeon, trout, flounder and red drum in the marsh. In the fall these people moved inland and changed their diets to include deer, small animals and wild turkey, as well as dried meat and acorns.



CUSABO
MAN WITH
HIS CATCH



Hunter taking aim

In the Midlands, native people grew corn, beans, squash and melons. For meat, they hunted animals using spears, bows and arrows or traps. Traps were also used to catch fish in the stream. The native people of the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains farmed corn and other vegetables on the fertile bottomland soil along the rivers and creeks. The Cherokee hunted deer, wild turkey, bear and small game.

They hunted large animals with spears or bows and arrows. They hollowed out river cane to make blowguns and used darts made from the stems of certain plants to hunt small animals such as birds, squirrel and rabbit. In the winter months the people stored food and gathered acorns, hickory nuts and walnuts.



HICKORY
NUTS

In order to provide food for deer and turkey, the people used controlled burning to thin out the weeds and brush, allowing sunlight to reach wild grasses which provided ample food for game animals.

DRIED DEER MEAT



Native men burning underbrush

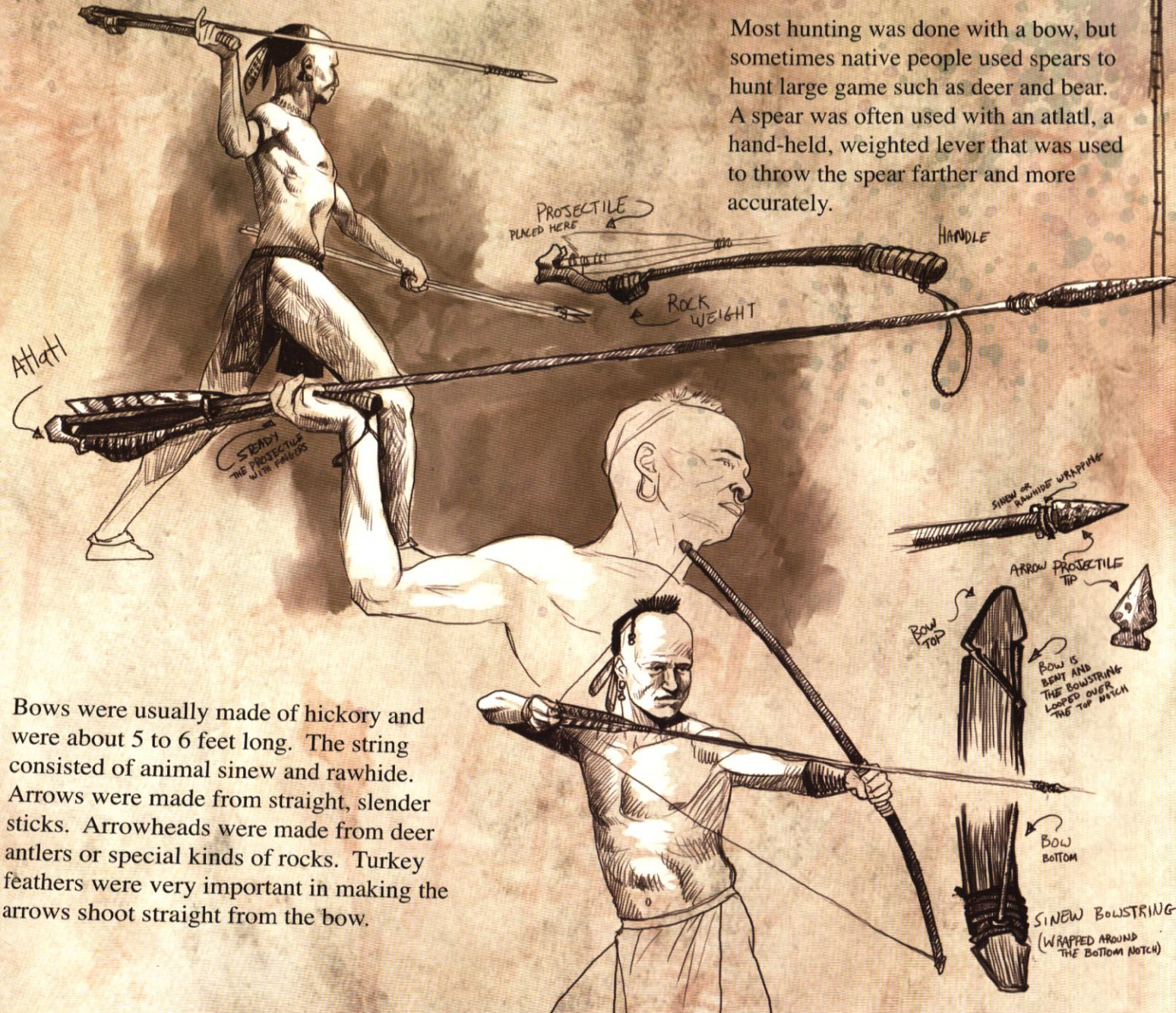


Roasting meat over an open fire

The people either boiled or roasted fish and shellfish (oysters, shrimp and clams). They usually cooked or barbequed deer on a wooden frame over a slow fire. Dried deer meat and fish were important food sources for native people in the winter months, and for people traveling long distances.

HUNTING TOOLS

Most hunting was done with a bow, but sometimes native people used spears to hunt large game such as deer and bear. A spear was often used with an atlatl, a hand-held, weighted lever that was used to throw the spear farther and more accurately.



Bows were usually made of hickory and were about 5 to 6 feet long. The string consisted of animal sinew and rawhide. Arrows were made from straight, slender sticks. Arrowheads were made from deer antlers or special kinds of rocks. Turkey feathers were very important in making the arrows shoot straight from the bow.

USING CROPS FOR FOOD

The most important crop cultivated by native people was corn, also known as maize. Corn came to the Southeast from Central America where it was grown by the Aztec and Mayan Indians several thousand years ago.

Native people of current South Carolina used corn in several ways. They used the kernels for food, and the husks for masks, baskets, sleeping mats and even dolls. The cobs were used for fuel and to make rattles.



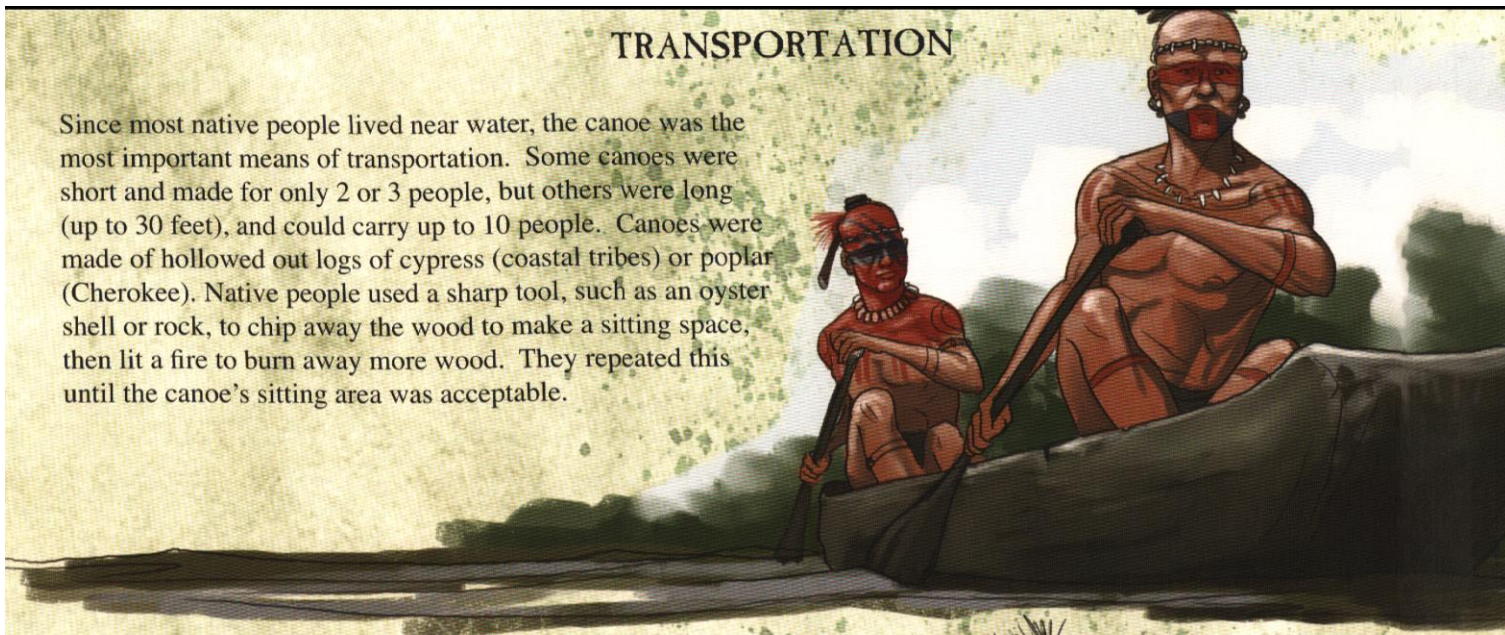
Corn was harvested in the milky stage for roasting, and dried kernels were made into corn meal and hominy. Hominy, like grits, was made by soaking the dried kernels in a wood ash-water mixture until they split. Dried hominy could be stored or carried by the men when going hunting or into battle. Corn meal, made by pounding dried corn kernels with a hard piece of wood or stone, could be made into cornbread, corn syrup or corn pudding. Beans or peas were often mixed with corn to make succotash. Other important crops were pumpkin, squash, melons and gourds. Berries, chestnuts, acorns, hickory nuts and walnuts were gathered from the forests and fields around the villages and consumed mostly in winter when other food was scarce.



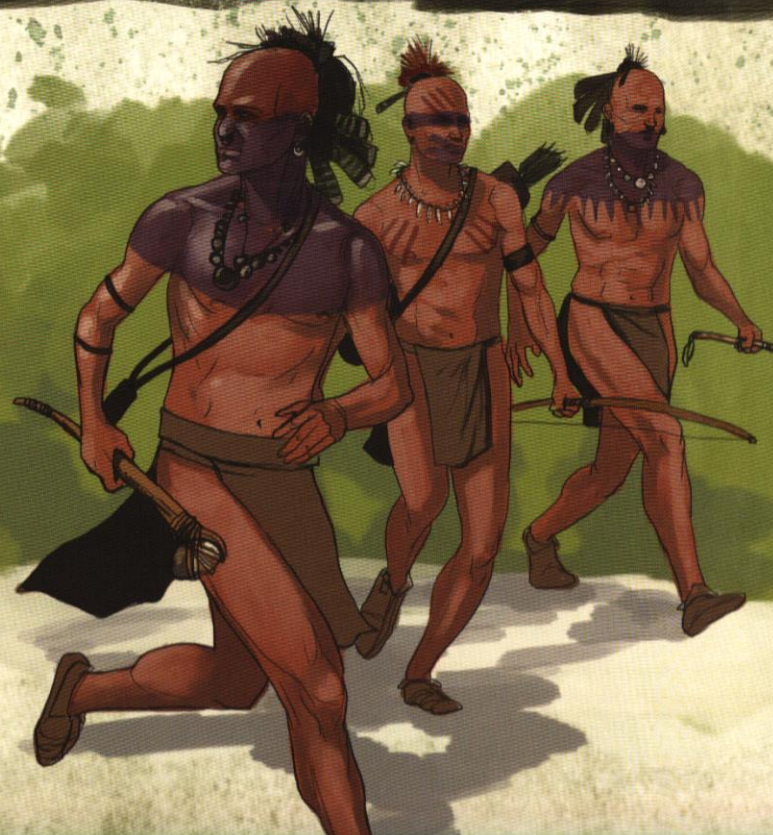
Acorns were pressed into paste and used to thicken soups or broth. Hickory nuts were beaten and boiled, and the oil that floated to the top was used for cooking and as a skin moisturizer. Wild fruit, like persimmon, was pressed into cakes and dried for winter eating.

TRANSPORTATION

Since most native people lived near water, the canoe was the most important means of transportation. Some canoes were short and made for only 2 or 3 people, but others were long (up to 30 feet), and could carry up to 10 people. Canoes were made of hollowed out logs of cypress (coastal tribes) or poplar (Cherokee). Native people used a sharp tool, such as an oyster shell or rock, to chip away the wood to make a sitting space, then lit a fire to burn away more wood. They repeated this until the canoe's sitting area was acceptable.



For traveling across land to hunt, gather food, do battle or just to visit other villages, native people used well-traveled trails where possible. They had great endurance and could travel distances of 10 to 20 miles in a day at a slow, steady run. In fact, modern-day fitness experts patterned “jogging” after this type of running.



GAMES AND RECREATION

Two games were very important in the social lives of the native people. Both were played in the village courtyard close to the Council House.

Chunkey was played with a round, smooth and polished flat stone resembling a hockey puck. The object of the game was for two players to roll the chunkey stone down a smooth and packed dirt surface while they threw long poles to see who could come closest to the stone. Chiefs or elite warriors usually won.



The other game was stickball, played much like today's lacrosse, but with two short sticks about 2 to 3 feet long, one in each hand. At the end of each stick was a small cup made of strips of deerskin leather. Stickball was played with two teams, both trying to get the small ball, made of a stone covered in deerskin, across the goal line of the other team. A goal was scored if the ball hit a pole or was shot between two poles. Games were very physical and often resulted in injuries. Villages had stickball teams and games between teams were watched by lots of people. Each team had a leader or "captain" – usually a well-known warrior. Today, the Cherokee still play stickball at annual tribal fairs.





The Green Corn Ceremony or The Busk was usually held for four to eight days in August after the green corn ears were harvested. It was the celebration of the good crop and a time of renewal. Native people put out the fires in their dwellings and in the council house. They fasted for three days, then they sang, danced, feasted and re-lit the ceremonial fires in the village square and in their homes. For some tribes, such as the Cherokee, the Green Corn Ceremony was a time for all to forgive grudges, debts and minor crimes.

CONFLICT AND WARFARE

Native people were generally not warlike, except in cases of revenge. In such situations, a war party would be sent to avenge the wrongdoing. Before going into battle, the warriors usually would coat themselves with bear grease and a reddish body paint made from a plant root.

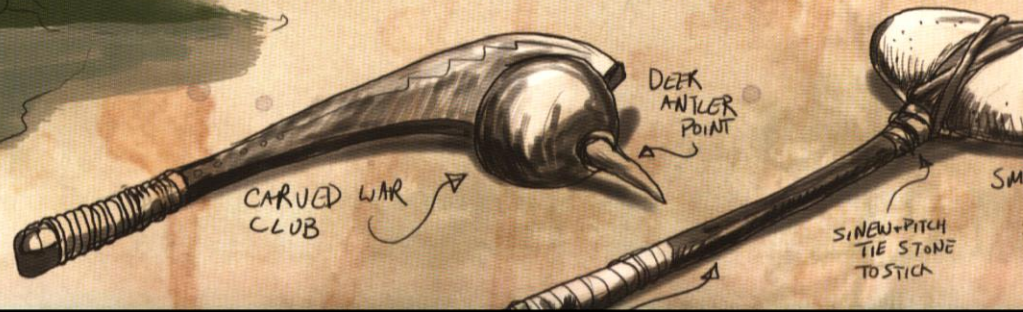


Cherokee warrior stalking his enemies—



CATAWBA WARRIOR

Warriors would decorate their heads with feathers, and paint their faces in various patterns, such as a circle of black around one eye and a circle of red around the other. Before European contact, weapons were primarily the bow and arrow, but tomahawks were used for close hand-to-hand combat.



CARVED WAR CLUB

DEER ANTLER POINT

SINOW+PITCH TIE STONE TO STICK