

# Indians in Arkansas: The Caddo

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The Caddo lived in several tribal groups in southwest Arkansas and nearby areas of Texas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma from A.D. 1000 to about A.D. 1800. When visited by Spanish and French explorers around 1700, they were organized into three allied confederacies, the Kadohadacho on the great bend of the Red River, the Natchitoches in west Louisiana, and the Hasinai in east Texas. The Cahinnio, who were allies of the Kadohadacho, lived along the Ouachita River. Each confederacy was made up of independent communities, but all had similar languages and customs.

The Caddo were sedentary farmers who grew corn, beans, pumpkins, squashes, watermelons, sunflowers, and tobacco. Hunting for bear, deer, small mammals, and birds brought in meat. The people also fished and gathered shellfish, nuts, berries, seeds, and roots. Those who lived on the edge of the plains also hunted bison in the historic period. Bows, commonly made of Osage orange (bois d'arc) wood, and stone- or bone-tipped cane arrows made up the normal hunting equipment.

Caddo people who lived near saline marshes or springs made salt by boiling brine (salty water) in large shallow pans. Just as we do, they liked salt to flavor their food, but salt was also traded, along with bear



Caddo locations in the 17th and 18th centuries.

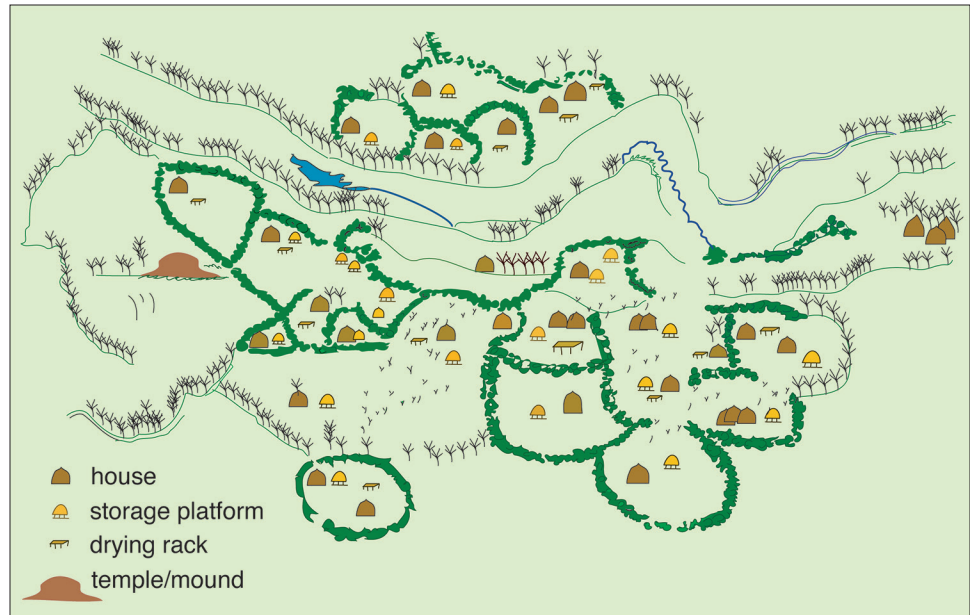


oil or lard, bois d'arc bows, animal skins, and other goods. Caddos traded with other Indians, and with European settlers. Horses and captives were traded to the French in exchange for European goods in the early historic period. The Caddo made elaborately decorated pottery, until metal and ceramic vessels acquired from traders replaced this art during the historic period.

Typically, men were the hunters. They also held most civic and religious roles, and were involved in warfare. Men and women shared some tasks in preparing gardens and building houses. Raising children, tending gardens, making food and clothing, preparing skins, and weaving mats were primarily women's work. During celebrations and ceremonies, each gender occasionally had its own special activities.

Before trade clothing became common, men wore breechcloths and moccasins with deer and bison skins added in winter. Women wore deerskin or woven skirts. In warm weather they went topless, and in winter they wore a skin wrap. Both sexes sometimes wore deerskin shirts with colored and beaded designs and fringes. Other elaborate deerskin garments were used on ceremonial occasions. Both men and women decorated their bodies with paint and tattoos. Women in particular sometimes tattooed their faces, arms, and torsos with elaborate designs. Men had several hair-styles; the most common was short with a long braided or otherwise decorated lock. Women wore their hair long and braided or tied close to the head.

Communities consisted of widely dispersed households separated by garden plots and woodlots. Each household or farmstead consisted of dwellings and work areas for one or more closely related families. The size, shape, and number of dwellings varied. Some houses were circular, conical, and covered



This illustration is based on a 17th century drawing of a Caddo settlement along the Great Bend of the Red River.

with thatch. Others were oval or rectangular, made of timber posts stuck vertically into the ground and daubed with mud, and roofed with thatch or bark. An elevated corncrib, outdoor work platform, and upright log mortar for pounding corn usually stood near the dwelling. Inside the house were sleeping and storage platforms for keeping baskets and supplies, and a central fireplace. Woven mats, usually made by women and often elaborately decorated, covered floors and benches, and were important ritual items. Each community also had at least one temple or religious building (in former times, located on top of an earthen platform mound), where sacred objects were kept and the most important rituals were performed.

Society was organized by households and clans. Social position, marriage prospects, and some political roles were based on clan membership. Political leaders of the community, tribe, and confederacy were a ranked set of offices, with a priest (or *xinesi*) holding the highest civil and religious position in the confederacy. Other leaders took care of various secular or



sacred activities. One group, the shamans (or *connas*), performed a variety of rituals and treated illnesses.

The Caddo world was populated by many supernatural beings who had varying degrees of importance and power. A supreme being, Ayo-Caddi-Aymay, had authority over all the others. A series of rituals performed to ensure favorable relations between people and these supernatural beings and forces organized the annual cycle of life. These included a springtime planting ceremony, an after-harvest ceremony in the fall, and numerous ceremonies to commemorate births, deaths, warfare, housebuilding, and other important individual and community events.

The multilayered organization of Caddo society provided a way to interact with Europeans. When European travelers approached a Caddo town, they were usually met on the path by a contingent of greeters from the community. The travelers would be escorted to the dwelling of the *caddi*, the community leader, or to a special structure, and be seated in a place of honor. Here community leaders shared with the Euro-

peans a smoke of tobacco from a calumet—an elaborately decorated pipe stem and bowl—which created a bond of friendship that extended to all members of the respective communities. This was how the Caddo recognized relationships among different members of their own confederacy, and they used the same ritual to incorporate Europeans within their hierarchically organized society.

The Caddo were important trading partners and allies of both France and Spain during the colonial era. However, epidemic diseases; competition and occasional hostilities with the Osage, the Cherokee, and the Choctaw; and the westward spread of American settlement eventually encroached on their domain. The Ouachita valley communities moved shortly after A.D. 1700, the last Red River communities were abandoned in the late 1700s, and in the nineteenth century most Caddo were forced to move first to Texas and then to reservations in Indian Territory. A large number of Caddos now live near Binger, Oklahoma, where their modern tribal center is located.

## For Further Reading

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