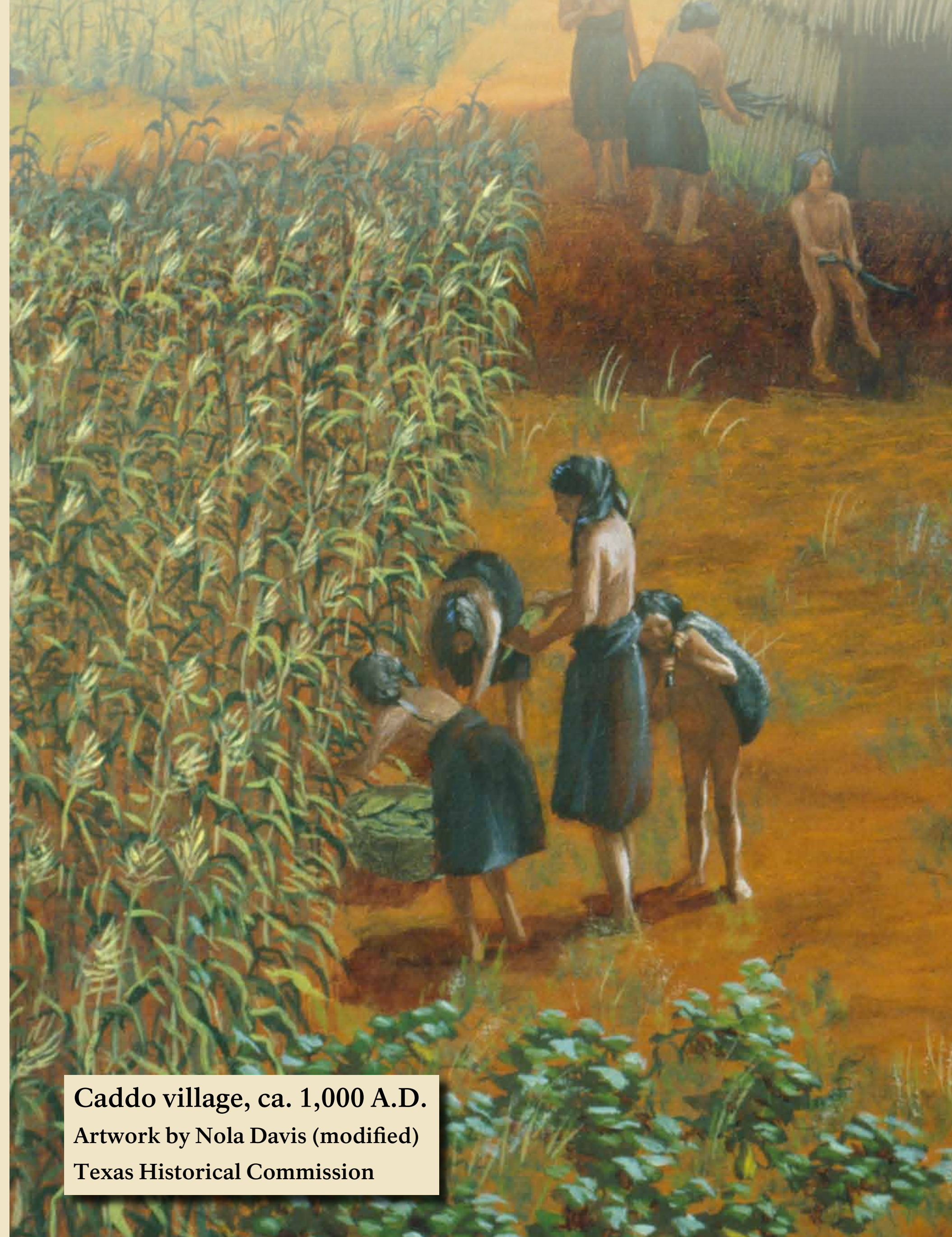


Planting History

The chocolate on your birthday cake, the corn in your breakfast cereal, and the pumpkin decorating your doorstep in October all trace their origins to places along El Camino Real de los Tejas, a network of trails from Mexico City across Texas and into northwest Louisiana.



Caddo village, ca. 1,000 A.D.
Artwork by Nola Davis (modified)
Texas Historical Commission

A Zoo of Plants from the Past

Plant life native to El Camino Real corridor has sustained the people and animals of the region from prehistoric times to the present. American Indians who lived along the trail shared maize, nopal, squash, and many more indigenous plants with the Spanish explorers. In turn, Spaniards introduced wheat, sugar cane, and melons.

Over time, the exchange of plants and animals between the Old and New Worlds altered the landscape and the people of both worlds. The diets of both groups expanded to include new crops that stimulated population growth.



The Living Laboratory

In front of you is a living laboratory. The zoo of plants still exists in gardens and on your daily plate. The cultivation of wild plants for modern crops has brightened our food and healed our wounds. Sweet and hot peppers added spice to our meals and salicin in willow bark extract led to the development of aspirin. In addition, oak tree tannins converted animal hides into leather, sumac plants dyed material red, and pine trees provided the timber for our homes.

Learning about the plant life of a region is a gateway to understanding the complex relationships between people, plants, and culture. You are part of the laboratory. What local foods did you eat today?



El Camino Real began as footpaths etched by native traders as they exchanged goods. Spanish colonists carved it deeper with caravans of vehicles, livestock, and people traveling north to settle.

Today, the trail that began as a scuff in the earth is a bustling highway in some places and a preserved trail in others. Follow your heritage through cities, woods, and rolling hills. Visit missions and presidios. For more information, go to www.nps.gov/elte.