

The Baumer Occupation at Kincaid

This piece introduces an important occupation at the Kincaid site that predates the Mississippian mounds by around a thousand years. The article describes the Baumer remains found in the SIUC 2003 test excavations near the southeast corner of the main plaza. Those excavations are more broadly described in the 2006 Butler and Welch article also available on this web site. The 2003 work was in advance of the construction of a small interpretive platform. Subsequently, the platform location was shifted some to the west where, in 2006, SIUC excavations of the platform footprint encountered more Baumer pits and recovered larger samples of dated artifacts. At the time, the Early and Middle Woodland Baumer occupation was thought to be the earliest major occupation at Kincaid, but subsequent work (2011) has shown that an intensively used Archaic Period habitation area also exists within the confines of the mound center.

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BEFORE THE MOUNDS: THE BAUMER OCCUPATION AT THE KINCAID SITE

By Brian M. Butler

The Kincaid site in the Black Bottom of the Ohio River has long been known as a major mound center of the Mississippian culture in the lower Ohio Valley (Figure 1). Less well known is the fact that the site con-

cultural tradition, which encompasses both the Early and Middle Woodland periods (Butler and Jefferies 1986). As a cultural unit, Baumer is still poorly defined. Its geographical boundaries are not entirely clear,

BAUMER AT KINCAID

Chicago archaeologists encountered Baumer deposits at Kincaid mostly along or near the bank of Avery Lake. These are the earliest known cultural deposits at the site, sitting directly on top of the basal clay deposits on the alluvial ridges. The distribution of Baumer occupation at Kincaid is complex, however; and we do not yet know its full extent. Based on the Chicago work and recent SIUC fieldwork (both excavation and geophysical survey), heavy Baumer occupation can be documented for a minimum distance of 300 m (990 ft.) along the lake frontage, roughly from the Pope-Massac County line to the western edge of mound Mx⁸ (Figure 2). This includes the area under mound Mx⁷ immediately north of the lakefront road and extending northwest under the southern edge of Mx⁸ (Butler et al. 2004). Baumer habitation may extend further in both directions along the lakefront, but good supporting evidence is currently lacking. Chicago investigators did report a few badly eroded Baumer sherds in the Late Woodland deposits under the burial mound

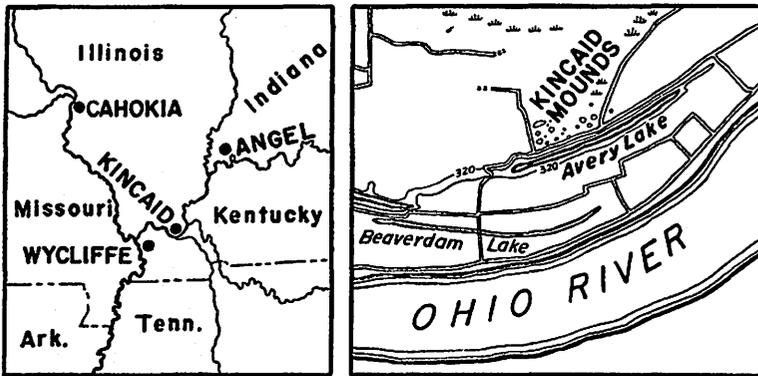


Figure 1. Location of the Kincaid site (adapted from Cole et al. 1951).

tains an extensive Early and Middle Woodland occupation. The University of Chicago archaeology program worked in the Black Bottom from 1934 to 1944. It focused on the Kincaid site (Cole et al. 1951), but it also had the goal of developing a local cultural sequence, so that Chicago archaeologists excavated Archaic and Woodland period sites in and around the Black Bottom. They identified a pre-Late Woodland occupation in the area, called the Baumer focus in the 1940s terminology. It is characterized by thick fabric or cord-marked pottery that is variously tempered with crushed limestone or grog, or both. The grog temper consists of crushed potsherds or chunks of fired clay. The typical vessel form is a tall conoidal jar with a small circular flat base. Although its presence was noted at Kincaid, the Baumer focus was defined largely from work at the Baumer site (Mxv30), a large village site in the western portion of the Black Bottom. The site occupies an alluvial ridge about 5 km (3 mi.) northwest of the Kincaid site (Cole et al. 1951:184-210), but it is situated in an area of swamp well away from the river and bottomland lakes.

Today, Baumer is understood as a local variant of the more expansive Crab Orchard

tending to the mouth of the Ohio River at Cairo. The primary differences between Baumer and Crab Orchard relate to the ceramics, with Baumer evidencing a marked preference for crushed limestone temper, which is often mixed with grog, especially in the Black Bottom. Elsewhere, where limestone is more readily available, the ceramics may be entirely limestone tempered, such as the Rose Hotel site at Elizabethtown (Herndon 1999). Another distinguishing characteristic is a marked scarcity of Havana Hopewell decorative influences, which are notable in many Middle Woodland Crab Orchard assemblages. Baumer ceramics do exhibit decoration, but, for the most part, the decoration does not appear to be Havana-inspired.

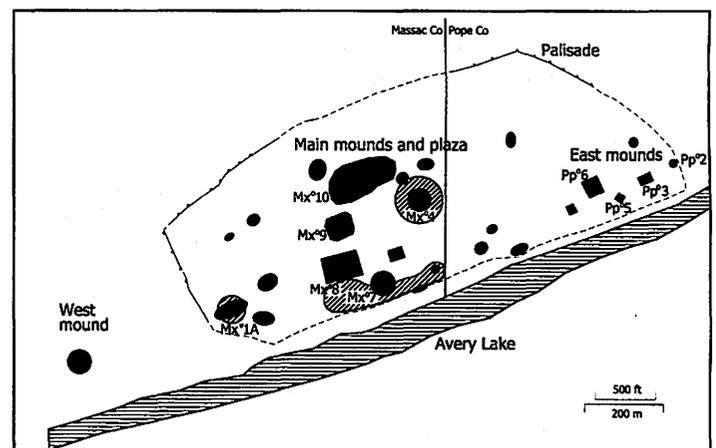


Figure 2. Current map of the Kincaid site showing known Baumer habitation areas.

Pp02, located at the far eastern edge of the site in Pope County (Cole et al. 1951: 106), but these are not enough to substantiate a habitation area there.

Baumer occupation also exists in some areas away from the lakefront. Chicago archaeologists reported that Baumer materials were found beneath mound Mx⁴ and at Mx^{1A} (Cole et al. 1951:184, 84). The mound Mx⁴ sits on an elevated area about 200 m (660 ft.) north of the lakefront road and is separated from the lakefront to the south by a swale, so the Baumer occupation is not continuous between those two areas. Mx^{1A} is an elongated rise or ridge situated about 250 m (825 ft.) west of Mx⁸ and about 80 m (264 ft.) north of the lakefront road. Chicago excavators described this as a village area, but we now know that the ridge feature is, in part, a low Mississippian mound. Baumer occupation may exist beneath the other major mounds, but none of the Chicago excavations reached the basal levels of those mounds.

In 2003, the Center for Archaeological Investigations at SIUC undertook test excavations in a small area at the southeast corner of the main plaza, adjacent to the county line and the lakefront road (Butler and Welch 2003, 2006). The purpose of the work was to evaluate an area for the possible construction of a parking area and viewing platform. A major concern was whether the basal remnants of a small Mississippian mound, Mx², suspected on the basis of Chicago excavations near that location, still existed (Figure 3). Although it was anticipated that some Baumer materials might be found, the investigators were surprised to encounter what was clearly an intensively used Baumer habitation area.

Topographically, the area of interest is the west end of a ridge feature that roughly parallels the lake and terminated at a major drainage feature. The area was seriously disturbed in 1953 when the county filled that drainage feature and realigned the road along the lake. R. Berle Clay (Cultural Resources Analysts, Inc.) conducted geophysical investigations of a 40 x 40 m (132 ft. x 132 ft.) area that included the expected impact area. The magnetometry survey, using a fluxgate gradiometer, revealed a large number of small, high-value magnetic anomalies situated on this ridge spur and its southern slope toward the lake (Figure 4). Subsequent coring and test excavation demonstrated that most of these anomalies are actually large Baumer pits, including both earth ovens and storage pits. These had strong magnetic signatures because they contain much pottery and burned clay. It was later determined in excavation that not all Baumer pits registered on

the magnetic map so the pits are even more numerous than the geophysical survey indicated.

Five 1 x 2 m (3.3 ft. x 6.6 ft.) test units were excavated. Ultimately, the work demonstrated that although the basal remnants of a mound were still on the ridge crest,

cause of their size, only limited portions of these pits were exposed in the test units. Two of the pits (Features 2 and 9) reached depths of 120 cm (47 in.) and were clearly storage pits (Figures 5 and 6). Feature 9 contained what appeared to be an entire crushed Baumer vessel, large portions of which were retrieved

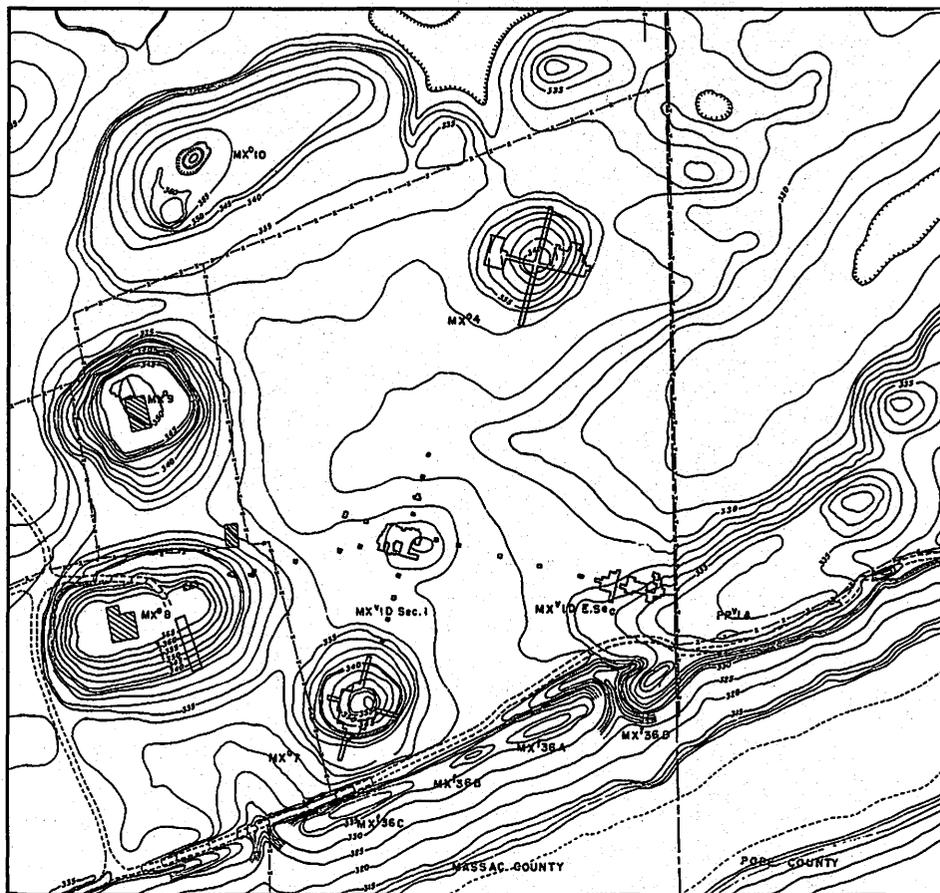


Figure 3. Location of the 2003 SIUC investigations (shaded circle) shown on the University of Chicago site map (adapted from Cole et al. 1951: Figure 69).

cultural deposits on the south slope of the ridge had been severely truncated by the 1953 roadwork. Essentially, the south slope was graded to provide fill for the new roadway and to fill the adjacent drainage feature. Remnants of a Baumer midden survived below the modern plow zone in four of the five test units. The Baumer living surface is differentially preserved over the area with much of it removed under the mound on the ridge crest. Elsewhere, the layer appears to have been incorporated to varying degrees within the Mississippian occupation zone. The many pit features associated with the Baumer occupation are, however, largely intact, and the test units encountered portions of seven of them.

Most of these were large pits, including both deep earth ovens and storage pits. Be-

from the profile. The ridge crest unit encountered a small Baumer storage pit under the remnants of the Mississippian mound. This pit, Feature 7, contained a dog burial, a rare find in southern Illinois (Figure 7). The dog was also unusual in being a very small adult animal, roughly the size of a modern fox terrier (Lapham 2005).

Only five of the Baumer features yielded enough pottery for meaningful comparisons. Overall, the surface treatment sample (621 sherds, with eroded-surface sherds and small sherd fragments excluded) is about 53% fabric marked, 32% plain (including partially smoothed and tool marked), 5% cord marked, and 5% decorated. The large amount of plain-surfaced sherds is unusual for most Crab Orchard components, but it appears to be characteristic of some Baumer

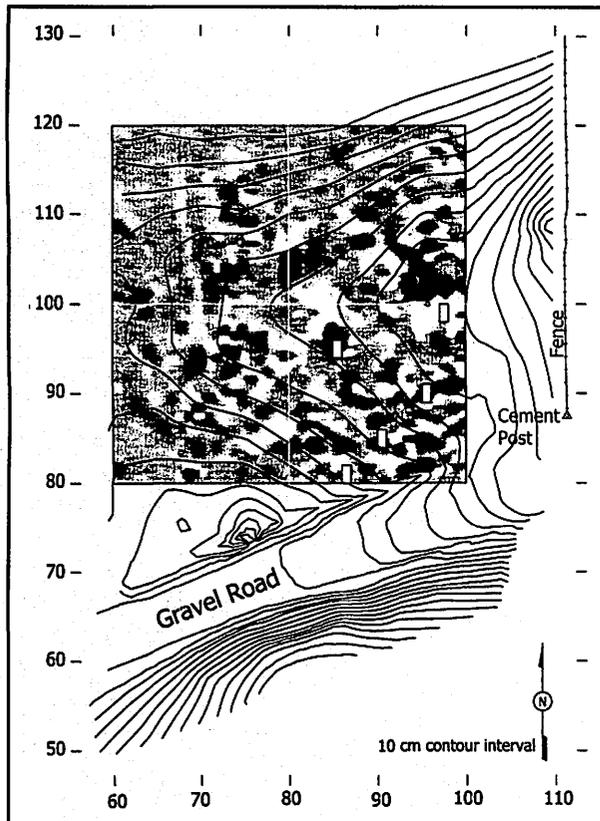


Figure 4. Area of 2003 investigations showing the current topography, gradiometer plot, and excavation units. Scale in meters.

occupations, at least in the Black Bottom. In terms of temper, the combined sample (708 sherds) is 64% limestone tempered, 28% limestone and grog tempered, and 8% grog tempered.

The ceramics contents suggest that the Baumer component in this location represents a considerable time span. The variation in the temper and surface treatment characteristics suggests a division between "earlier" and "later" features. Features 7 and 9 yielded an assemblage that is predominantly fabric marked (60%) and limestone tempered (67%) with only a small amount of pure grog temper (4%). Features 2, 4, and 8 have a rather different assemblage, one that has substantially less fabric marked (41%), with increased amounts of plain, cord-marked and decorated sherds. The temper is only 52% limestone with 15% grog temper. Based on our current understanding of ceramic trends in the region, Features 7 and 9 would be viewed as earlier, and the Feature 2, 4, and 8 assemblage as later.

In both Crab Orchard and Baumer assemblages, fabric-marked surfaces generally predominate early, with cord marking becoming more important in Middle Wood-

land times. Also, the early ceramics are generally tempered with crushed rock, with mixtures with grog appearing later, and with late assemblages sometimes exhibiting significant amounts of grog-tempered ceramics. Here, both suggested temporal groups have high percentages of mixed (limestone and grog) temper, 33% and 29%, respectively, and that does not appear to have any great temporal significance. In the Black Bottom, where limestone is difficult to obtain, mixtures with grog may have been used earlier and with greater frequency than in other locales.

A radiocarbon date was obtained on wood charcoal from Feature 9, an assay paid for by a grant from the IAAA Permanent Fund. The sample, Beta 191043, yielded a conventional radiocarbon age of 2170 ± 60 B.P. Unfortunately, the date falls in a segment of the calibration curve that has a major "wobble," a situation which produces a large potential date range. The calibrated

160 B.C., an interpretation that is consistent with the ceramic comparisons. Features 7 and 9 are viewed as being late Early Woodland, and Features 2, 4, and 8 as Middle Woodland.

The Baumer component also yielded a small collection of debitage (417 items) and 15 chipped stone tools/tool fragments. The Baumer tools include three hafted bifaces—expanding stemmed points of the Affinis Snyders and Lowe types. One notable aspect of the collection is the strong presence of Dover chert from the lower Cumberland River valley. In fact, it is the most important single raw material, comprising 37% of the debitage by count and 31% by weight. Dover items include 36 hoe flakes, a small fragment of a hoe, and some other biface fragments. The Mississippian occupation at Kincaid has been noted for its high percentage of Dover chert compared to Mill Creek chert (Bell 1943; Santeford 1982), but these results confirm earlier observations (Bell 1943) that Dover chert was important in the Black Bottom by Middle Woodland times.

The Kincaid site was an important settlement long before the construction of the Mississippian mounds. Although the Baumer component of Kincaid site has been known since the 1930s, recent investigations have demonstrated that it is a much more intensive occupation than previously thought. The Baumer occupation is also of substantial du-

ration, encompassing portions of both the Early and Middle Woodland periods. Habitation is concentrated along the front of Avery Lake, although some occupation is documented under Mx04 and Mx1A away from the lake and may also exist under some of the other large mounds. The density of pit features is quite high in some lakefront areas, and some of the pits contain large quantities of refuse. The principal Baumer settlement in the Black Bottom, and probably within a much larger area, is the

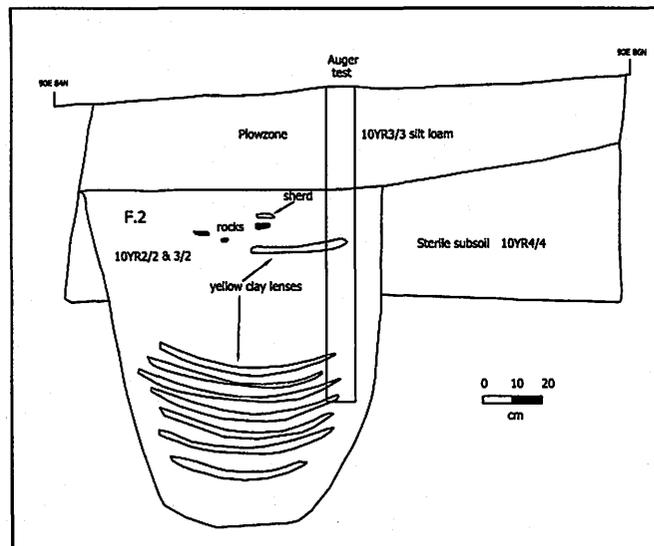


Figure 5. Profile of Feature 2 in the west wall of Unit 90E 84N.

intercept of the date is 200 B.C. but the 2 Sigma range is from 380 to 50 B.C. From the probability distributions, one can conclude that the sample most likely pre-dates

Baumer site itself. However, Kincaid's location on an open lake in the eastern half of the bottomland and much closer to the river may have offered some important advantages, both

in terms of food resources and access to the river. This location clearly was attractive to Baumer peoples, and their occupation at

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graphics used in Figures 2, 4, 5, and 6. SIUC students Megan Donnigan and Tobias Donaker conducted analyses of the ceramics and lithics from the excavations with support from the Undergraduate Assistantship Program at SIUC. Rachel Pepper, another SIUC undergraduate assistant, prepared the drawing of the dog burial used

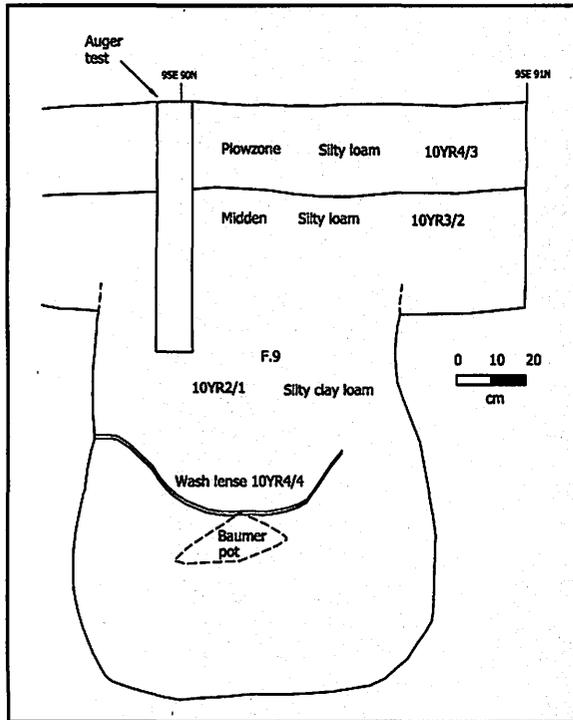


Figure 6. Profile of Feature 9 in the west wall of Unit 95E 89N.

Kincaid represents an important aspect of the local Baumer settlement system.

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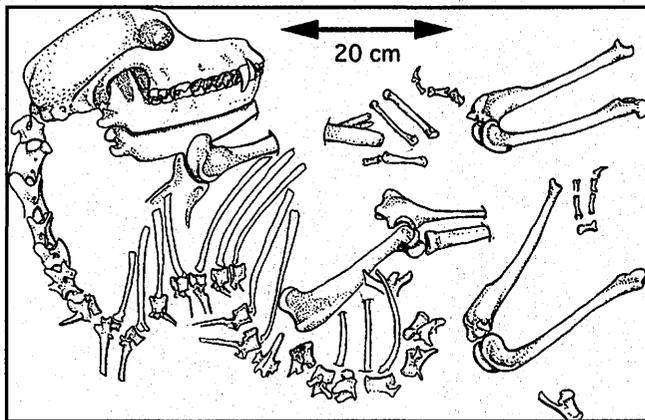


Figure 7. Drawing of dog burial from Feature 7. North is at top.

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in Figure 7.

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