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Old Copper, Glacial Kame and Red Ocher Cultures

Old Copper Complex

One of the most visible and influential of the Archaic cultures was Old Copper Complex (7,000 – 3,000 BP) of the western Great Lakes, named for their heavy use of cold-worked [copper](#) for weaponry, tools, and decorative objects. (Thomas C. Pleger 2002)

Veins and nuggets of almost pure copper were deposited glaciers in gravel beds around [Lake Superior](#) and near Etowah in the [Appalachian Mountains](#) of Alabama.

(Welch 1991) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Copper_Complex

The Old Copper people did not have smelting technology. They cold hammered this copper to produce points, tools and decorative objects. They developed a trading network to export copper artifacts and nuggets for other exotic materials.

About 3,000 years ago, the Old Copper Complex changed. Copper use became restricted to jewelry and other status-related items, possibly because of increased demand for status items from an emerging elite class in a more complex hierarchical culture. Copper was no longer used for tools and other utilitarian objects.

(Thomas C. Pleger 2000)

The Red Ocher and Glacial Kame Cultures

These cultures occupied the same territory at the same time, and were very similar.

“The Glacial Kame and Red Ocher peoples were (both) either physical and cultural descendants of Old Copper or followers of the same cultural traditions.”

(Ritzenthaler 1962 citing (Robert E. Ritzenthaler 1957) pp. 278-279)

In Lake County, Illinois, a Glacial Kame site is within a few miles of a Red Ocher site. The Glacial Kame graves were dug into the gravel, and six flexed skeletons of were covered with powdered red ocher. They were buried with copper beads and sandal sole gorgets of marine shell, the diagnostic trait of the Glacial Kame.



(Keller 2009) Fig 6; P 26

Glacial Kame sandal-sole gorget

If instead of the sandal-sole gorgets, there were turkey-tail blades (below) the site would have been classified as Red Ocher.



http://projectilepoints.net/Points/Turkeytail_Fulton.html

The Glacial Kame Culture

The Glacial Kame people occupied southern Ontario, Michigan, Ohio and Indiana between about 6,000 to 3,000 BP. Their graves often contained artifacts of marine shell and copper sites but few or no projectile points. The few points that have been found are of several different styles. One Ohio site yielded just three projectile points, each of which was significantly different from the other two.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glacial_Kame_Culture

The Red Ocher Culture

The Red Ocher people lived in the Upper Great Lakes and the Illinois and Ohio River Valleys for 1,400 years, between 3,500 and 2,100 BP. The Culture is named for their practice of sprinkling powdered red ocher (iron oxide (Fe_2O_3)), over the bodies and in the graves of their deceased.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Ocher_people

Red Ocher sites are identified by: flexed pit burials with red ocher in the graves; turkey-tail blades, large ceremonial knives; and caches of ovate points.

Red Ocher sites occasionally have; mound burials, birdstones, tube pipes, and early Woodland pottery, all traits seen in their likely cultural and physical descendants, the Adena people.

(Robert E. Ritzenthaler and Quimby 1962)

Pottery at Red Ocher sites is first seen about 2,500 BP. With the introduction of pottery, the Red Ocher evolved from an Archaic into a Woodland culture.

Dating

The Red Ocher has been radiocarbon dated between about 3,500 – 2,500 BP. (Quimby, 1960b, pp. 17, 26)(Cole and Deuel 1937) pp. 204-205.

- The early Red Ocher Andrews site in Michigan was dated $3,210 \pm 300$ BP from human bone in graves with red ocher and birdstones. (M-659, Crane and Griffin, 1960, p. 34)
- The late Red Ocher Sny-Magill in Iowa, dated $2540 - 2,470 \pm 250$ BP (M-308, Crane and Griffin 1958, p. 1099).

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Appendix 1 Red Ocher sites

(Robert E. Ritzenthaler and Quimby 1962)

WISCONSIN

Carey site (Brown, 1916, pp. 73-75). Burials associated with artifacts; red ocher in the graves; **2 pop-eyed birdstones** of ground slate.

Layton Park site (Brown, 1916, p. 39).

Thiensville site (Ritzenthaler and Niehoff, 1958, pp. 115-119; Niehoff, 1959, pp. 26-27). 3 burials about 7 feet deep in a sand ridge. One burial was in flexed position, the other two may have been. Red ocher was abundant in the graves.

Port Washington site (Quimby, 1957, pp. 1-3). Numerous artifacts were found with or near a burial in gravel 4 to 6 feet deep

Leon site (Gerend, 1920, p. 189).

Molash Creek site (Quimby, 1958) Artifacts found with or near a burial in a ridge of sand: There was evidence of red ocher on the skeleton and on some artifacts.

Hathaway site, Manitowoc County (Brown, 1907, p. 63; Falge, 1915, p. 149) .

Whitefish Bay / Mashek site (Brown, 1907, pp. 61-62, and 1924, p. 70; Shumacher, 1918, p. 141)

Stephensville site, (Brown, 1907, p. 63, and 1930, p. 103; Fox, 1916, p. 16).

Chalk Hills site (Brown, 1940, p. 75).

Wolf River site (Brown, 1907, p. 68). A cache of 40 ovate triangular points, 6 turkey-tail blades, and 1 **socketed copper point**.

Wautoma site (Brown, 1907, p. 61)

Fond du Lac site (Brown, 1915, p. 179). A large, leaf-shaped ceremonial blade 10 inches long was found in a gravel pit that contained burials.

Barteil site, Dodge County (Brown, 1915, pi. 5 and pp. 177-178). In 1911, a leaf-shaped 12” ceremonial blade was found with a burial in a gravel pit.

Boltonville site, Washington County (Brown, 1907, p. 64).

Pewaukee Lake site (Brown, 1907, p. 64, and 1930, pp. 99-100).

Lisbon site (Brown, 1930, p. 100).

Janesville site (Brown, 1907, p. 64)

Stoughton site (Brown, 1915, pp. 178-179).

New Lisbon site, (Brown, 1907, p. 64).

IOWA

Sny-Magill site (Beaubien, 1953, pp. 57-60). Mound 43 was 70 feet in diameter and 5 feet high. The mound contained 4 groups of bundle burials at least one of which might be considered a tightly flexed burial inasmuch as many of the bones had been held in proper anatomical order by the ligaments. This mound also contained thick layers of red ocher; large ceremonial blades; stemmed points; spheroidal copper beads. One sherd was **grit-tempered** and **cord marked**; others were **grit-tempered**, but were decorated with rocker stamp and twisted cord impressions forming **bands of geometric design**.

Harpers Ferry site (Beaubien, 1953, p. 60). In a mound, a red ocher floor 30 feet in diameter was associated with bundle burials; 1 leaf-shaped ceremonial blade; 125 beads of copper; 1 bar amulet ("long copper bar") of copper.

ILLINOIS

Beake site (Quimby notes).

Morton site (Cole and Deuel, 1937, pp. 65-69). A low, **dome-shaped burial mound** on a ridge of yellow loess was formed from earth brought to cover bodies successively laid on the ground. The lowermost burials were placed in pits dug into the yellow loess. There were flexed and semi flexed burials, disarticulated skeletons that may have been bundle burials, and cremations. Some burials were accompanied by caches of lanceolate blades. Burials and/or caches had been sprinkled with powdered red ocher (profusely in three) and seven were without red ocher.

There were cuboids of galena and metallic hematite (red ocher) showing facets as if ground for paint.

Copper artifacts included a rectangular plaque; an awl or pin, and 16 tubular beads. Shell objects included 1 pear-shaped, two-hole gorget that had been broken and mended, 2 circular gorgets, and 12 beads fashioned from Marginella shells.

Animal remains were those of deer, elk, and dog. Objects of bone were a cut section of antler, an awl made from a deer metapodial bone and a split metapodial bone of an elk.

Morton site FH (Cole and Deuel, 1937, pp. 87, 89-90). The Red Ocher burials lay on undisturbed yellow loess. Five of seven bodies were covered with red ocher. The earth piled back over the bodies formed a low mound. One burial was without any grave goods and three burials had a fair amount of grave goods.

Morse site (Morse, 1959, pp. 194-200). 18 burials, less than 20 per cent of which had associated grave goods. The skeletons were semi-flexed or tightly flexed in pits in a natural ridge of loess. Most of the skeletons had red ocher with them. Artifacts found here include about 70 ovate-triangular cache points.

Banner site (Morse, 1959, p. 201; Wray, 1937).

Fifteen flexed burials covered with red ocher were found in a mound. Artifacts from this mound included turkey-tail blades; a leaf-shaped ceremonial knife; 1 piece of galena; and 1 rim sherd of thick grit-tempered pottery (Marion Thick).

INDIANA

Kankakee River site (Faulkner, in press).

Oak Grove site (Faulkner, in press) a burial accompanied by copper artifacts, red ocher on blades, turkey-tail blades, leaf-shaped ceremonial blades, and ovate-triangular flint cache points stained with red ocher.

Dyer site (Quimby, 1960a, p. 5). burial in a deep grave pit in a sand ridge. Within the grave was the flexed skeleton of an adult accompanied by profuse quantities of powdered red ocher and burial goods including turkey-tail blades, a leaf-shaped ceremonial blade about 19 inches long, and copper beads.

Brandywine Creek site (Townsend, 1959, pp. 190-192) In 1911 there was found at this site a cache of turkey-tail blades; a small bust-type birdstone of white quartzite; and a stone celt. The turkey-tail blades and birdstone were liberally stained with red ocher.

Mound site Sh 78 (Dragoo, 1951, p. 29). A small mound burial with artifacts including turkey-tail blades; a birdstone of ground and polished slate; and sherds of grit-tempered, cord marked pottery.

Hasler site (Townsend, 1959, pp. 192-194) A burial with a ball of red ocher and a bust-type birdstone.

Site Mr-215 (see Faulkner, 1960, pp. 36-38) In 1947, more than 300 whole and broken ovate-triangular cache points were found in a sand knoll on a farm in Green Township.

Peterson site, Pulaski County (Faulkner, 1960, pp. 42-45). A burial in a sand knoll with modified turkey tail blades; 320 ovate-triangular cache points; and about 100 tubular beads of copper.

OHIO

Spetnagle site (Anonymous, 1923, pp. 639-640)

Kick site (Case, 1877, p. 267)

MICHIGAN

Moccasin Bluff-A site (Hills, 1898, p. 77)

Kimmel site (Papworth, 1958, pp. 51-56)

Frazier site (Smith, 1901, pp. 22-24)

Andrews site (Smith, 1901, pp. 21-22; Townsend, 1959, pp. 219-225) This site is on a sandy ridge, in the Lake Huron basin. Grave pits contained flexed burials, bundle burials, and cremations, powdered red ocher, and burial goods. Artifacts included turkey-tail blades; ovate-triangular cache points; side-notched and square-stemmed points of chipped flint; copper celts; stone celts; heavy awls of copper, square in section; smaller copper awls and needles; cylindrical and spheroidal beads of copper; 1 copper harpoon point with multiple barbs on one side only; and 4 birdstones.

Haitiner site (Gerald Haitiner pers comm.).

ONTARIO

Killarney Bay Mound (Greenman, 1953, p. 177; 1954, p. 4.).