

these phenomena are usually taken as indicators of heightened social complexity. This, then, is an interesting understanding of the term collapse because collapse is often taken to mean a rapid simplification of society, following Tainter's well-known definition (1988), or by others, such as Diamond (2005), to mean significant and rapid depopulation. It is unclear how rapidly these changes are thought to have taken place, although the authors suggest that human events happen "within short time intervals of between one to three centuries" (p. 44), and that domestication "was achieved gradually" (p. 34).

The volume as a whole will provoke thought amongst collapsologists, but should be used with care. Weiss's Introduction pushes the megadrought collapse agenda and dismisses McAnany and Yoffee's important *Questioning collapse* volume (2009) by calling them 'politically correct'—because they want to problematise the characterisation of collapse and to place humans at the centre of the story—and simply omits additional work, but other chapters are not so deterministic. We might also question whether the slow abandonment of the city of Angkor, and the continuation of the Khmer state, is really comparable with an imperial collapse (Akkadian), the collapses of the Eastern Mediterranean c. 1200 BC, or with the take-up of sedentary agriculture. While Weiss suggests that his determinists are turning the tide against those who consider social factors key, it is rather the case that both views have long co-existed and have fed off each other; as there are difficulties in weighting factors in collapse, this to and fro seems likely to continue. The deterministic approach adopted here seems to go against the grain of twenty-first-century collapse research, which is now much more open to non-deterministic, non-linear reconstructions emphasising historical particularity (Middleton 2017).

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BÉRÉNICE BELLINA (ed.). *Khao Sam Kaeo. An early port-city between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea* (Mémoires Archéologiques 28). 2017. Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient; 978-2-85539-427-5 €65.



Khao Sam Kaeo (hereafter KSK) is a large archaeological site located near Chumphon on the eastern coast of the Malay Peninsula, southern Thailand. Looting activities

at the site started in the 1960s and continue to the present. A first publication of non-local artefacts with origins across South and East Asia attracted experts' attention to the site more than 20 years ago (Srisuchat 1993). Since 2002, the site has been investigated by a joint Thai-French team.

This final publication includes 23 papers by 25 authors from different countries. The excavations of the Thai-French Archaeological Mission have covered 136 test pits and 5 trenches. Thus, almost 600m<sup>2</sup> from the total site area of 350 000m<sup>2</sup> have been investigated. A catalogue of the artefacts from the excavated pits is not provided. Rather, most papers focus on in-depth classification or analyses of ceramic sherds, stone, glass and metal objects. While this provides valuable information on the various artefact types, it remains impossible to recognise associated artefacts from different layers or test pits, and it is difficult to detect which artefacts came from looting, surveys or the excavated pits. Profile views are illustrated for 41 of the excavation pits/trenches, with occasional plan views. These illustrations show a quite complex stratigraphy with looting holes,

disturbances and pits, but artefacts or radiocarbon-dating sample positions are not plotted and there are no field photographs. The site is interpreted as: “the earliest port-city identified so far in the South China Sea”, and an “enclosed settlement [...] thrived from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC” (pp. 19–20). This timeframe, in some chapters even more limited to the fourth to second centuries, determines the authors’ concept of the cultural context of the site and its material, despite the fact that many artefacts are clearly younger.

In which period was KSK occupied—and why? In view of the great problems with radiocarbon dates in Southeast Asia over the last 45 years, it is surprising that only half a page is dedicated to the discussion of the 31 dates recovered from the excavations. In total, 23 radiocarbon dates correlate to the Iron Age ‘port-city’. Three of these cover the period from the first to the seventh centuries AD. The remaining 20 fall in the suggested period from the fourth to the second centuries—truly an impressive coincidence, but they cannot be related to the majority of artefacts as the provenance of the latter is unclear. 17 stone seals or intaglios, 7 seal-shaped beads and a gold seal are dated to between the third century BC and the sixth century AD, but none of them came from the excavated test pits. For the KSK team, the seals “prove that the site might have been sparsely inhabited in the early centuries AD, but this occupation was probably less active” (p. 206).

This leads to another issue: many of the later-dated objects—mirrors, seals or gold ornaments—are normally discovered in burials. Again, none of these artefacts came from the excavated test pits, but rather from the looter excavations. There is no chapter on burials, but some were excavated in test pits from across the site. Moreover, the villagers confirmed that they uncovered “Big pots [...] with ashes and fine ornaments” (p. 199). This increases the impression that many exotic artefacts in the hands of looters and villagers were in fact offerings in burials and not ‘trade ware’. Furthermore, the KSK team concludes that the western part of hill 2 contained a looted jar burial cemetery, which would be a big surprise for this period on the Malay Peninsula, as the nearest contemporaneous jar burial sites are 800km to the east in the bay of Vung Tau. In addition, gold objects were discovered at the northern and southern slopes of hill 2 and indicate—according to the authors—disturbed inhumations (p. 507). Apparently, burials existed at every hill. This increases the impression

that many exotic artefacts from KSK were in fact offerings in burials and not ‘trade ware’.

The interpretation of KSK as a ‘port-city’ and head of a trade route crossing the Isthmus, which “required the combination of [...] porters, pack animals [...] bullock carts, and other vehicles such as rafts and canoes” (pp. 31–32), is intriguing. If KSK was, however, really a prominent point in an east–west land bridge, then it would make more sense to locate this port at the west and not the east bank of the north–south flowing river. The interpretation of this site as a ‘port-city’ or “unusually cosmopolitan city” (p. 215) rests on the assumption of a “community of at least a few thousand people at its height, and perhaps [is] more [...] suggested by the density of artefacts” (p. 214). An overview of the data of what was collected at KSK would have helped to support this claim.

The number of pottery sherds collected through survey and excavation at the site was 38 080 (p. 235), a relatively modest amount for a ‘city’ with thousands of people. In a detailed study, Phaedra Bouvet presents the collection of the ceramics in four chapters. ‘Local and regional pottery’ contains about 80 per cent of all analysed sherds, but no indication of their dating. ‘Indian Fine Wares’ includes ‘rouletted decorated plates’, dated to the fourth to second centuries BC. The rather worn and tiny sherds of rouletted ware from KSK are, however, more similar to those in the well-dated layers of the first century BC or younger at Tissamaharama on Sri Lanka (Schenk 2006). This means the vessels circulated during the second century on the Malay Peninsula, but the sherds recovered from KSK are very probably younger. ‘Lustrous Black and Red Wares’ include very different non-local ceramic wares, among them vessels and bowls that are typical burial offerings on sites in the Mekong-Delta from the third to the last centuries BC and later. Bouvet also mentioned 127 sherds of a special ceramic that is known as ‘orange ware’ in southern Vietnam and Cambodia from the end of the second century BC and more numerous later from the first centuries AD. Altogether, 84 small sherds of Han ceramics were discovered in 22 test pits or from the surface, mainly at hill 3, and these are discussed by Peronnet and Srikanlaya. It would be useful to learn precisely where the Han Dynasty-period sherds were discovered—they could be as important as the radiocarbon dates.

Further chapters examine specific artefact groups. 435 stone ornaments were recovered from KSK, of

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which 195 came from test pits or surveys. Bellina suggests that this low concentration represents a local household-scale production system (p. 450). Hsiao-chun Hung and Yoshiyuki Iizuka discuss the nephrite ear ornaments, using mineral analyses of a range of similar ear pendants from across Southeast Asia to argue for the existence of two origin regions for the raw material in eastern Taiwan and central Vietnam (p. 466). Gold, iron and bronze artefacts are discussed by Pryce and colleagues. About 50 small gold ornaments and foil pieces recovered from looting activities are illustrated, but just one gold bead was excavated. Iron artefacts are rare, with two from archaeological contexts and 10 from the villagers, and there is no evidence for iron ore smelting at this site. Iron smithing is, however, attested, with slag recovered from 69 of the 136 test pits. 36 bronze artefacts (bowls, mirrors, drums, seals, bracelets) came from looted areas, and some technical ceramics and crucible slag are seen as proofs for local bronze production. 2551 glass objects include beads (90 per cent Indo-Pacific beads), manufacturing by-products and waste, of which about 1500 were found in just six test pits around hill 2, probably a glass-working area.

Finally, it is interesting to consider what has not been found at KSK. There is no evidence for ceramic production, gold-working or casting moulds for bronze objects. Spindle whorls and artefacts made of bone, wood, antlers or other organic materials are not mentioned in the report. An exemplary archaeobotanical study by Cristina Castillo, however, demonstrates that rice dominates the assemblage (*Oryza sativa Japonica*), while foxtail millet, mung bean, tree cotton and long pepper are also present. The chapter is superbly illustrated, the origin of the macro remains in test pits and layers is formally listed and the detailed description of the research steps may serve as a model for further work in archaeobotany, still a severely neglected field in Southeast Asia.

In summary, this is an important publication that places Khao Sam Kaeo, although heavily looted and partially excavated, among the best-recorded archaeological sites in Southeast Asia. It is to be hoped that the interpretation and chronology of the site remain under discussion.

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- MICHAEL J. GALL & RICHARD F. VEIT (ed.). *Archaeologies of African American life in the Upper Mid-Atlantic*. 2017. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press; 978-0-8173-1965-6 \$69.95.



This book provides another contribution to the growing archaeological literature on African-American life outside the southern USA. The editors designate their region “a cultural borderland” bounded by New York City to the north and Philadelphia to the south (p. 1).

Of the nine sites examined, four are located in Delaware, two each in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, and one in New York. The authors collectively address a range of subjects within enslavement and freedom, and examine some of the most important issues of contemporary historical archaeology in North America, including the distribution of colonowares, life in enslavement, tenant-farmer material culture, landscape significance, the linkage between racial assignment and class position, and the challenges of emancipation. The editors explicitly conceive of the book as “part social history, part activism” (p. 3), and intend it as an assault on the historical silences surrounding racism, dominance and oppression against African-Americans.

The authors pursue research along three themes central to African-American archaeology: slavery and material culture (three chapters); housing, community and labour (five chapters); and death and memorialisation (three chapters). In keeping with today’s disciplinary realities, academics, commercial archaeologists, historical