

Part 3. Discussion

Chapter 1. The Ceramics Unearthed from Longvek and Krang Kor

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1. Introduction

Conventionally, archeological studies of Cambodia focused mainly on the prehistoric times and the Angkor period, and the post-Angkor period were virtually ignored. This “post-Angkor period” points to the approximately 430-year timeframe between the fall of Angkor in 1431 until 1863 when the French colonial rule began. These 430 years had been cloaked in mystery for a long time. It has only been in recent years that first steps in archeological research of the said period was started mainly by the Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties (Nara 2008). Research was conducted at Longvek, the royal capital of the post-Angkor period, and Krang Kor, a site at which burials was discovered, and many artifacts were excavated there. The unearthed artifacts serve an important role in explaining Cambodia during the post-Angkor period. This chapter will look back on the ceramics, which were excavated at both of the sites, and discuss their characteristics and significance.

2. Ceramics Excavated at the Krang Kor Site

As explained in Part 1, the archaeological research of the Krang Kor site can be considered an important case, as two burials were discovered in good condition and a large volume of assemblage that are highly likely connected with each other had been excavated. Of imported ceramics, Si Satchanalai celadon, Chinese celadon, and Jingdezhen blue and white porcelain were all given the general dates of mid-15th century to early 16th century (Chart 1). Further, from surveying the ground surfaces, a greater variety of ceramics found. Among those found were many Ming blue and white porcelain, Si Satchanalai celadon, Binh Dinh celadon, Myanmar celadon, Khmer brown-glazed stoneware and earthenware, majority of them can be hypothesized as being from the period between 15th century to early 16th century. This is after the Angkor collapsed in 1431 and the location of the capital was moved, marking the beginning of a period of political instability for Cambodia. In such a time, there was likely a force in Krang Kor that had the ability to acquire the kind of ceramics that we excavated in our research.

3. Ceramics Excavated at Longvek

For this archaeological research conducted in Longvek, we were not able to fine comb through the entire area of 500 hectares, which spanned two kilometers east to west and 2.5 kilometers north to south. However, at least at the current stage, an abundant amount of artifacts were found on the grounds surface mainly in Longvek’s southern area, particularly around the earthen wall there (Fig.1). For example, the earthen wall at the southern area of Longvek had a high density of imported ceramics, particularly Ming blue and white porcelain (Fig.2). Additionally, from the ground’s surface around the mound near the Preah An Tep, a few slag-like artifacts were found (Fig.3). Although further research is necessary in order to determine whether iron was being produced at that time, this discovery offers the possibility of it being the first step toward understanding the situation surrounding metal production inside of royal capital in the post-Angkor period.

The ceramics excavated at Longvek are attributed the dates that is one stage later than those given to the abovementioned ceramics excavated at the Krang Kor site. Of the ceramics found at Longvek, 60% are Chinese blue and white porcelain. Many have the characteristics of chiefly late Ming period, or late 16th century to early 17th century (Chart 2). Majority of these being Jingdezhen blue and white bowl, five-color blue and white porcelain and blue and white porcelain with green glaze. According to the Royal Chronicle, Longvek lasted from 1529 to 1594. Majority of the artifacts excavated at Longvek could be given the approximate date of late 16th century to early 17th century, which is not much different from what is stated in the Royal Chronicle. However, because around 40% of the artifacts found at Longvek are from the late 17th century or later, it cannot be said at this point that they directly reflect the historical events found in the Royal Chronicle. In fact, we perhaps ought to consider the possibility that in late 17th century, Longvek was still being used in some capacity even after the royal capital was moved to Oudong about seven kilometers to the south.

4. Distribution of Ceramics

From the Krang Kor site, we found Ming blue and white porcelain and a variety of ceramics made in Southeast Asia from 15th to early 16th century. On the other hand, from the royal capital of Longvek, many pieces Chinese blue and white porcelain, and mainly the Ming to Qing blue and white porcelain from the early 17th century through 18th century were found.

Of the artifacts excavated at the Krang Kor site that date back to 15th century through early 16th century include Jingdezhen blue and white porcelain, Si Satchanalai celadon, Myanmar celadon, and Binh Dinh celadon, but unfortunately very few of these were found within Cambodia. However, ceramics with commonalities were found among the materials found in shipwrecks in Asian seas—for example, those found off the coast of Koh Samui and Santa Cruz (Brown 2009). The said period is when the active overseas exporting of ceramic made in Thailand, Myanmar, and Vietnam began. We need to conduct further research in order to determine through what routes the ceramics made in Southeast Asia and excavated at the Krang Kor site ended up there, but it is presumed that it happened via a combination of sea, land, and river routes. The ceramics from Thailand and Myanmar, for example, could have crossed the Gulf of Siam and been brought on shore on Cambodia's side, or they may have optimized the use of land routes to arrive in Cambodia. Moreover, the Binh Dinh celadon could have arrived through land routes, or they could have been loaded onto a trade ship along with Chinese blue and white porcelain and brought in to Cambodia. Whatever the case, we need to accumulate more research findings related to sites in different regions from the same period in order to further examine the distribution routes of the aforementioned period.

At the same time, this is in no small amount influenced by the fact that Longvek is situated on the western banks of the Tonle Sap River and at a location beneficial for trade. Gaspar Da Cruz, the Portuguese missionary in 16th century traveled upstream on the river and came ashore in Cambodia (Gaspar 1987), and this allows us to presume that trading vessels could also have traveled the river route from the Mekong River to Tonle Sap River and arrived in the area of Longvek via Phnom Penh.

The pictorial map drawn by the Dutch in the 17th century (Muller 1917) is entitled Eavweck (Fig.4), and it shows the Longvek, the royal palace believed to be Oudong, houses that stand along the Tonle Sap River, and land routes that connect these and stretch beyond the mountain ranges. Included in the map presumably are elements necessary for political and trade activities. In this research, we specifically examined the royal capital and the sites around it, along with the excavated ceramics, thereby uncovering however slightly some aspects of the societal and economical activities of the relevant time period. Using these findings as the starting point, we will likely need to continue to further research the areas around Longvek, Oudong and Krang Kor site in order to empirically discover what the conditions were in Cambodia during this particular time period.

Reference:

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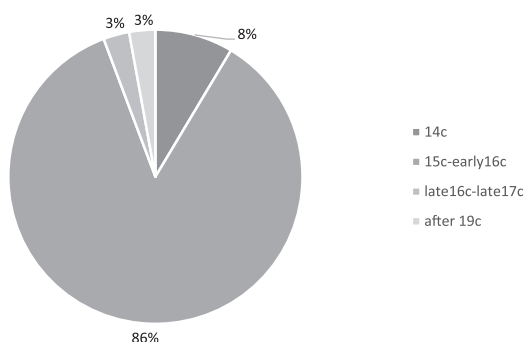


Chart 1. Ratio of periods of artifacts excavated at Krang Kor

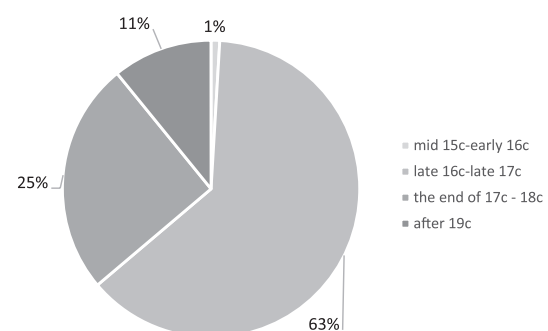


Chart 2. Ratio of periods of artifacts excavated at Longvek

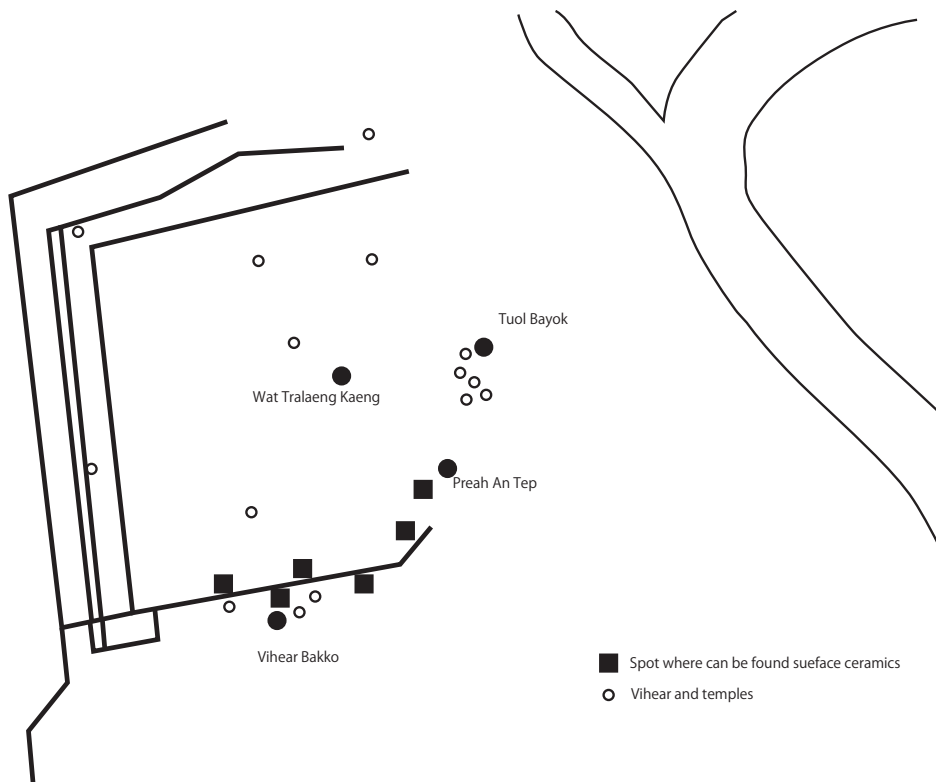


Fig. 1 Outline map of Longvek



Fig. 2 Artifacts found at the southeast corner of Longvek

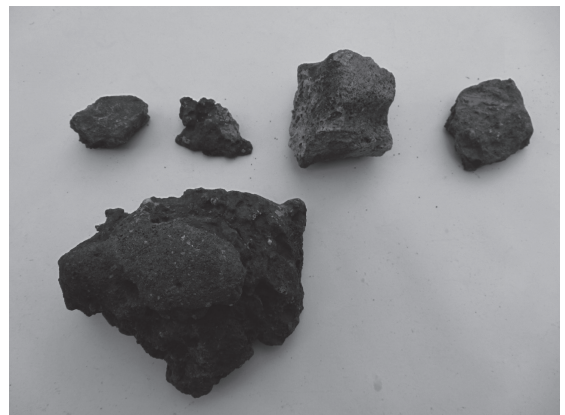


Fig. 3 Slag-like artifacts found near Preah An Tep

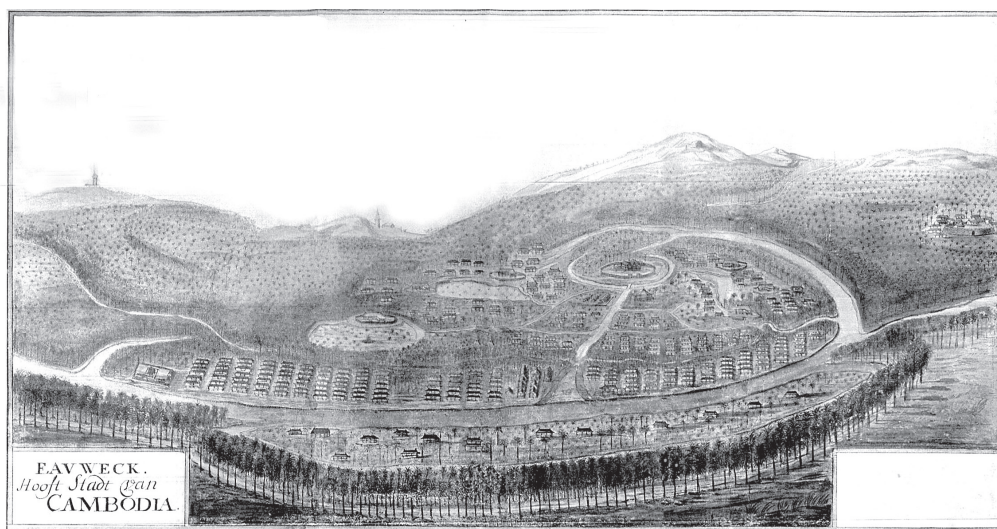


Fig. 4 Pictorial map of the area around Longvek (Muller 1917).