

Supplementary Report on the Chong Samrong Excavation

November, 2014

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The first excavation of the Chong Samrong kiln at Kambo Or Village, conducted as a training program in 2013, exposed the main body of the kiln, which had been constructed of manipulated clay on an artificial mound. At the time there appeared to be some indication of the firebox of the kiln at the lower (northern) end of the mound. Further work on the site in August 2013 had the goal of locating the stokeholes but in fact exposed the firewalls of two kilns. That meant the stokeholes were about two meters further to the north. Additional excavation was required to locate them and determine the exact length of the kiln.

Excavation

On 27 November 2014 a small team comprising Sorn Chantarn, Muong Chanreaksmey, and Don Hein, all of whom had participated in the earlier work, returned to the site, where they were joined by archaeologist Sat Pen, who was stationed at Beng Mealea temple. From the second day Sat Pen brought two workmen, Krieh Leng and Sy Sou, to assist with surface duties. Using the survey points ST1 and ST2, two excavation squares, Y4 and Y5, were set out in line with the pre-existing grid. (Fig. 1)

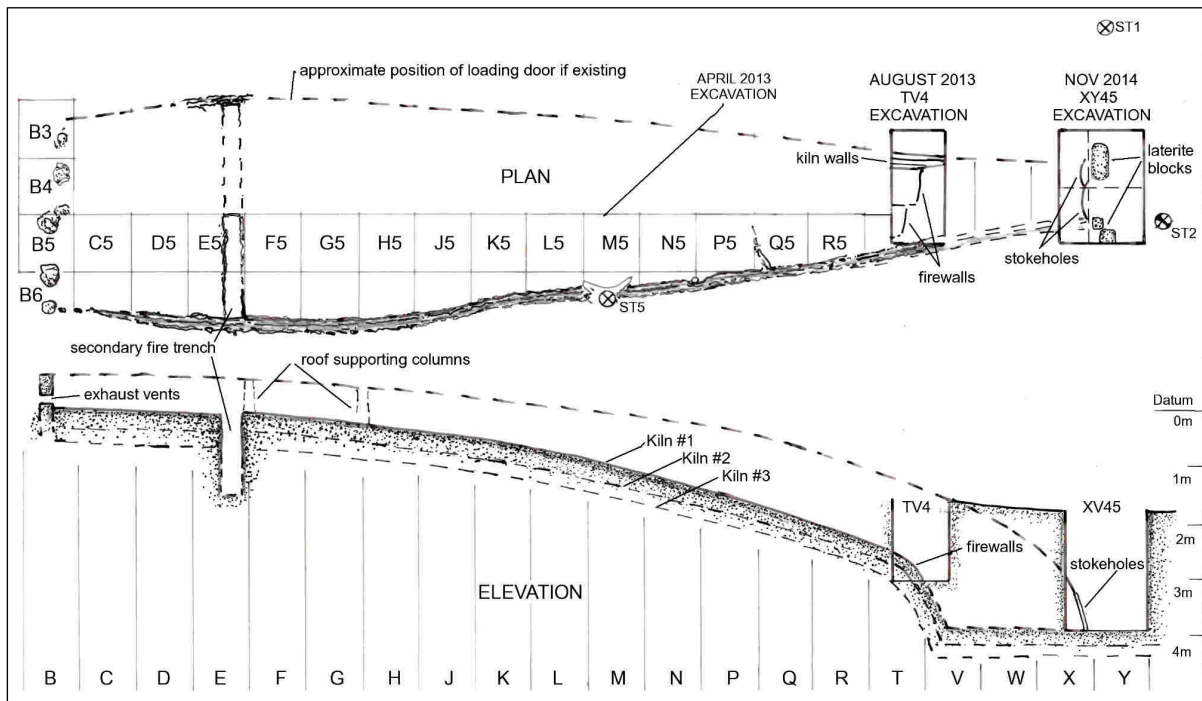


Figure 1. Plan and elevation of Chong Samrong Kiln #1 showing 2013 and 2014 excavations.

The excavation employed 20cm levels (spits) rather than the usual 10cm, on the understanding that the ground under study may have been included in the disturbance known

to have occurred during the Khmer Rouge period, or that the ground was post-operational fill. In the upper levels the excavated soil was consistently dark and loamy, except near the eastern lower wall of Y4. At the lower depth of the excavation the sediment became damp and at the two meter level the seasonally variable water table was reached. Finds were few but were bagged with identification of site, level, square, and date.

At the depth of 1.6 meters on the southern wall of the excavation, the face of a stokehole assumed to belong to kiln #1 was found in Y4. A little further down, the face of another stokehole assumed to belong to kiln #2 was revealed, mostly in Y5 but overlapping the boundary between the two squares. Several large blocks of laterite were also found. Those to the left (east) of the stokehole in F5 were in their original position. One in Y4 had fallen and was moved to allow access to the stokehole in that Square. Ground water prevented further exposure of these features. The pit was extended 50 centimeters toward the main body of the kiln, into squares X4 and X5, which provided greater exposure of the stokeholes.

The total excavation depth to ground water level was 2.2 meters. After recording, the pit was backfilled with sand to within 30 centimeters of the surface¹, then with soil. The site was then 'made good'. The excavation had taken six days.

Results

The two stokeholes belonged to kilns #1 and #2. The third kiln (the lowest and first kiln in the mound) was not found, because ground water prevented excavation to a lower level where kiln #3 was thought to be². Both stokeholes were of an inverted 'U' shape about 70 centimeters wide but of indeterminate height. Like the main body of the kilns, they were constructed of manipulated clay.

The purpose of the laterite blocks was to reinforce that part of the wall of the work area closest to the kiln and subject to collapse³. After abandonment of the kiln, such reinforcement often fell into the work area and that occurred in the case of the large block from the work area wall in Y4.

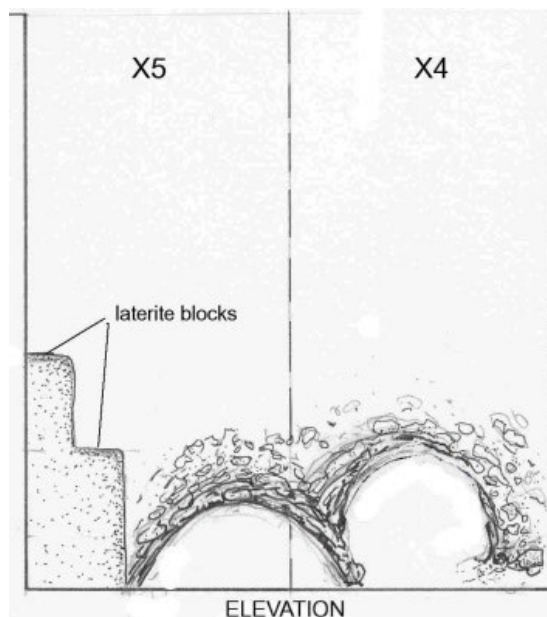


Fig. 2. The lower stokehole (on the left) cuts into the higher one.

¹ The sand, from river sources, was supplied by the same villagers as for the earlier work.

² Although it is possible that the stokehole may have been further back (toward the chimney vent) and not reached in the excavation.

³ The space outside the kiln used by the potters to load and fire the kiln is known as the work area. Because the firebox was dug into the ground, so too was the work area, and they shared a common floor level. The wall between the kiln and work area was most at risk of collapse and usually required support, provided in this case by laterite blocks.

The few ceramic finds were taken back to the ceramic study-storage center at the APSARA Authority offices in Siem Reap, where they were washed and examined. As they were few in number and small in size and of no particular importance (conforming to the description of finds from the earlier excavations of the kiln), they were stored for future reference.

Conclusion

The main value of the excavation was the determination of the general proportions of the kilns. While the orthographic length was 19 meters, the measurement along the incline of the mound approached 20 meters. Whereas the firing chambers of the kilns shared a common axis, the stokeholes were separated laterally, which indicated that at least one of the fireboxes deviated from the main kiln axis. Furthermore, it appeared that the stokehole at a lower level in Y5 was the last of the two to be built, because its construction damaged the stokehole located at a higher level in Y4. (Fig. 2)

This assumption that the lower stokehole belongs to kiln #1 is contradictory to the relativity of the firewalls found in the earlier excavation (August 2013), where it was shown that the upper firewall belonged to kiln #1. Confirmation of this could only be attained by additional excavation of the firebox area, for which no facility of time or authority was available.

The length of 20 meters (amended from the earlier estimate of 16 meters) raised the question of how the kiln was loaded for firing. Passing unfired wares from the firebox along the length of the firing chamber would have been arduous and time consuming. The upper kiln excavated at the nearby site of Torp Chey had a loading door about three quarters along the righthand wall of the firing chamber; it would have served to assist loading into the upper half of the chamber. As the righthand wall of the Chong Samrong kiln was not excavated, it was not determined whether a loading door existed or not.

The circumstance of insufficient time to complete the work demonstrates the need for careful planning and commitment in the excavation of such historic sites. While the first excavation of Chong Samrong, as a training program with a fixed term of one month, achieved its aims, it could not satisfactorily answer all of the resultant archaeological questions. The limited excavation in August 2013 aimed to confirm the stokehole area of the kilns but instead revealed firewalls. The short-term excavation of November 2014 aimed to locate the stokeholes of Chong Samrong, which it did and in so doing established that the kiln's length was comparable to the kilns of Torp Chey. This made the single secondary fire trench of Chong Samrong—compared to three trenches of Torp Chey—much more significant. It also raised, but left unanswered, important questions about the form of the fireboxes of Chong Samrong.



Figs. 3-6. Suite of images showing the progress of the November 2014 excavation, including the team beginning the dig; the laterite block in front of the righthand stokehole; the intrusion of ground water; backfilling with sand and 'making good' with top soil; and a moment of rest at the conclusion of the work.