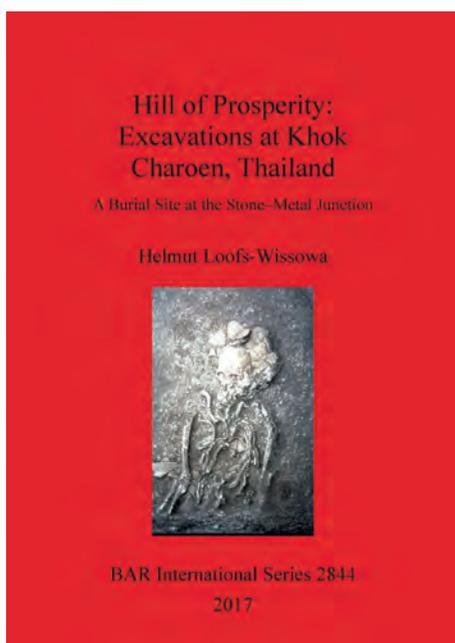


peace talks to leverage an end to extraterritoriality. Equally compelling is the author's demonstration of the enduring idea of Siam's First World War victory that continues to reverberate in Thailand's collective memory. His study concludes with an exploration of the monuments, memorials, histories, organizations, and films dedicated to Siam's Great War adventure. The conclusion makes clear that Siam's short experiences on the European battlefields and negotiating tables in 1918-19 have cast a long shadow over Thailand's leadership, armed forces, and citizenry in the century that followed. Stefan Hell's excellent study should be labeled "required reading" for anyone interested in a full and nuanced account of this important chapter in the kingdom's history.

Richard A. Ruth

*Hill of Prosperity: Excavations at Khok Charoen, Thailand. A Burial Site at the Stone-Metal Junction* by Helmut Loofs-Wissowa. Oxford: BAR Publishing, 2017. ISBN: 9781407315065. £73.



Many foreign archaeologists have excavated prehistoric sites in Thailand, and too few have published a final report. It is, therefore, a rare pleasure to find that the excavations at Khok Charoen, that took place half a century ago, have now been described in this important volume. Khok Charoen (KC) is one of the few Neolithic sites in Thailand to have been excavated, and still stands as one that has furnished a large assemblage of human burials matched by more recent fieldwork at Khok Phanom Di, Ban Non Wat and Nong Ratchabat in Supanburi. The site lies on the eastern edge of the Bangkok plain, just north of Chai Badan. A series of low mounds that bisect two streams, it appears to have been a cemetery, for despite test pits and at least three major areas opened by excavations, very little evidence has been forthcoming for where the Neolithic inhabitants lived, save for

the occasional post hole and non-mortuary potsherds.

This report, therefore, concentrates on the mortuary record identified in three different parts of the site. Each interment from KC III is described: the sex and age of the dead individual, the orientation and the associated mortuary offerings. These are illustrated with black and white photographs and sketches of each burial, with each grave labelled and described in the text. Some burials were virtually devoid of associated artefacts, but others were relatively wealthy. Burial 6 from area III, for example, involved an adult

female, who lay with at least eleven ceramic vessels. She wore a stone bracelet on the right, and probably a second bracelet comprising 103 shell disc beads on the left wrist. Offerings, that chime with more recently excavated Neolithic sites, include tektites and bivalve shells that continued as almost certainly symbolic offerings representing fertility well into the Iron Age.

Khok Charoen IV lies 160 metres north of KC III, near the junction of the two streams. As with KC III, the excavation was laid out in four by four metre squares divided by one metre baulks. Again, the burials, nineteen in all, are described one by one. Here, the layout incorporated the initial test squares designated KC I. The graves were relatively widely spaced, on a north or north-east orientation. Unlike Khok Phanom Di, there is no clustering of possible kin groups, and in this respect, the layout is most similar to that seen in the later of the two Neolithic mortuary phases at Ban Non Wat. The same variation in the wealth of the graves was identified. Burial 8 in this area, for example, had an adult female as the primary interment, but at least two infants and the fragmentary bones of a young male were also recovered. Several bivalve shells were associated, as well as at least ten pottery vessels and one or two stone adzes.

Excavations at Khok Charoen II, the largest of the three and located on the eastern edge of the site, have been reported in Wendy Ho's dissertation, and are not further described in this volume other than the integration of the principal results. It was found that the forty-five graves in this area were later than those in the other excavated areas.

The pottery vessels are one of the finest collections from any Neolithic site in Thailand, and are illustrated by fine line drawings. A salient characteristic is the range of designs incised on their exterior surfaces. These belong to a widespread Southeast Asian horizon, that is well represented at Ban Non Wat, Khok Phanom Di, Nong Ratchabat and beyond, into the Phung Nguyen culture of Northern Vietnam. The chronological contexts for these vessels go back to about 2000 BC. They are the hallmark for the expansion into Southeast Asia of rice and millet farmers from the Yangtze and Yellow River valleys. The initial Neolithic settlers also brought their own tradition of extended inhumation interment, stone adzes and the manufacture of shell and stone ornaments, particularly in the form of beads. All these are represented at Khok Charoen, including impressions of rice and millet on some of the pottery vessels. Helmut Loofs-Wissowa encountered difficulties half a century ago with obtaining suitable radiocarbon samples for dating and, indeed, radiocarbon dating has developed since in leaps and bounds. He prefers, conservatively, a chronological context in the later part of the Neolithic span, placing Khok Charoen somewhere in the period 1300-1000 BC. I tend to think this a little conservative: it might be earlier by several centuries.

It is timely that this volume should appear in Helmut Loofs-Wissowa's ninetieth year. He is a true pioneer of Southeast Asian prehistory. In my opinion, one of his most characteristic and accurate statements was to describe the dating of Ban Chiang bronzes in the fourth millennium BC as "not science, but science fiction". He is to be congratulated on fulfilling his obligations, and joining a small group of those who actually publish their Thai excavations.

Charles Higham