

Clues to Southeast Asian civilisation unearthed

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Dr Marc Oxenham (centre) at the cemetery site in Northern Vietnam.

(Phys.org) —An archaeological dig led by Dr Marc Oxenham from The Australian National University's School of Archaeology and Anthropology has uncovered possibly the earliest cemetery site in Southeast Asia.

More than 140 ancient burials including men, women, teenagers and children have been recovered from the site in the Thanh Hoa province in Northern Vietnam.

The [burial site](#), known as Con Co Ngua, is believed to have existed sometime between 5,000 and 6,000 years ago. [Rising sea levels](#) helped preserve the site under a thick cap of marine clay.

"Archaeological cemeteries and living sites of such [antiquity](#) are all but unknown in the region, with only a handful of burials from a number of cave sites previously known," Dr Oxenham said.

Most of the bodies from the site were buried in a squatting position with their hands clasped in their laps and chins resting on their knees. Further research revealed the bodies were most likely wrapped tightly prior to burial and placed in circular earth pits with perishable items such as cuts of meat from buffalo or deer.

"The significance of this discovery – apart from its great age, size, [plethora](#) of artifacts and amazing level of preservation – is that it represents a crucial period in the archaeology of Southeast Asia," Dr Oxenham said.

"The discovery tells us that the Con Co Ngua people are likely descendants of the original colonisers of [Southeast Asia](#) and Australia. In fact, putting flesh back on their bones would reveal people that looked a lot like modern day indigenous Australians and Melanesians.

"It will now take an army of students and academics to decode the mysteries of the site and the people that once lived there."

Provided by Australian National University

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