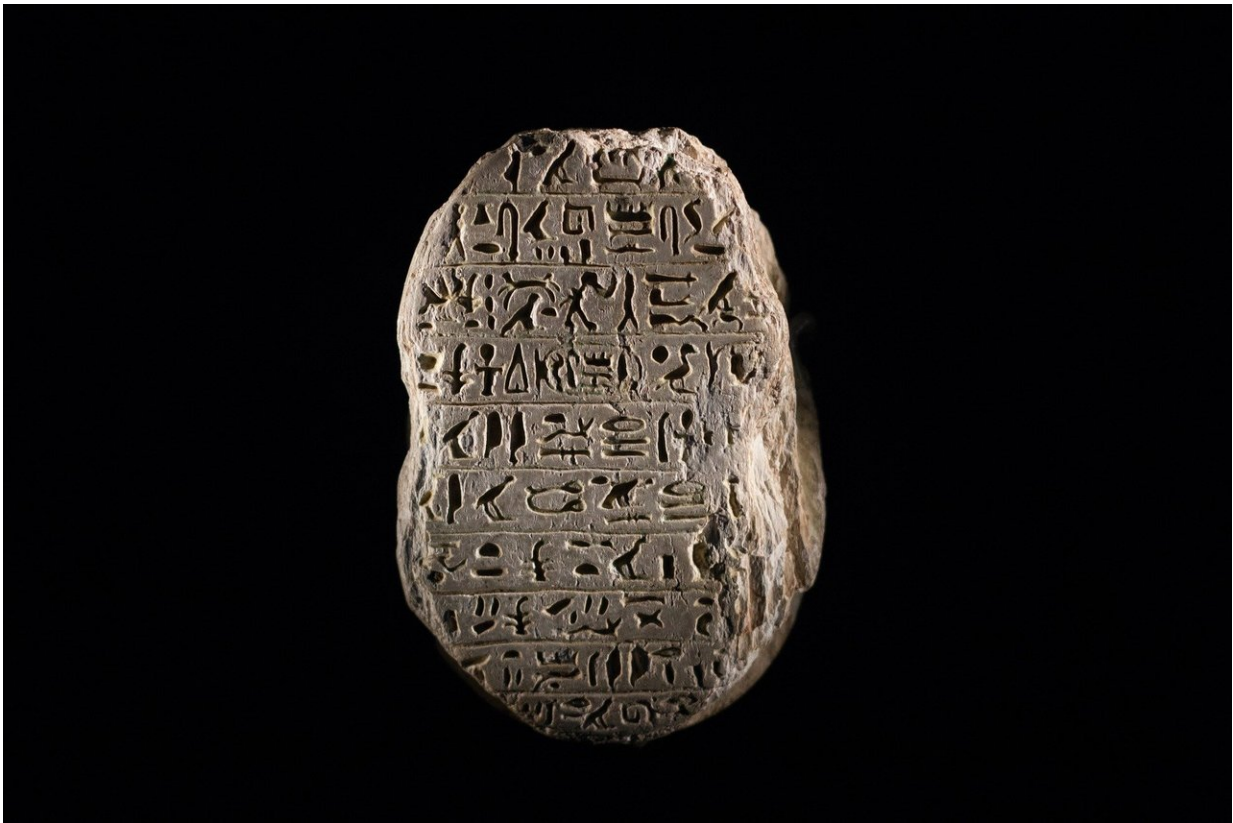


# Historian angers group who proposed labeling late Holocene as Meghalayan Age

September 21 2018, by Bob Yirka

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Guy Middleton, a historian at the Czech Institute of Egyptology at Charles University in Prague, has angered members of the group who successfully pushed for the creation of a new unit of geological time

called the Meghalayan Age. In his Perspective piece published in the journal *Science*, he claims that evidence of widespread collapse of civilizations following the onset of a mega-drought in 2200 BCE, is lacking.

Earlier this summer, the International Commission on Stratigraphy announced that a new [geological time](#) category had been approved. The Meghalayan Age covers the time span from 2200 BCE up till the present. Prior to this summer, it had been generally referred to as the late Holocene period. The group chose the starting point of the age as approximately 4200 years ago because prior evidence has shown that was the beginning of a mega-drought.

Middleton does not dispute this claim, but focuses on other statements made by members of the group that proposed the change. In their presentation, they noted that the mega-drought resulted in the collapse of a number of civilizations—in Greece, Mesopotamia, Syria, Egypt, Palestine, the Yangtze River Valley and the Indus Valley. This last one was particularly significant because the new age was named for a state in what is now India—Meghalaya. Middleton claims that there is no real evidence of mass civilizations collapsing. He suggests that at most, there was restructuring of several societies due to the drought. He further suggests that because of this inaccuracy, it is inappropriate to use the date chosen as a meaningful threshold for a new geologic age. He adds that he believes that such errors crop up due to a lack of communication between archaeologists and historians—a problem that could be solved with more interdisciplinary collaborations.

Such statements have angered some of the people who proposed the labeling of the new age, according to Robinson Meyer, in a column for *The Atlantic*. He claims a squabble has arisen due to the piece Middleton published. He writes that some of the Meghalayan group have even gone so far as to question Middleton's credentials, calling him a "failed

archeology Ph.D." Others have suggested that the claims by Middleton were poorly researched and are misleading.

**More information:** Guy D. Middleton. Bang or whimper?, *Science* (2018). [DOI: 10.1126/science.aau8834](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aau8834)

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