New research casts doubt on cause of Angkor's collapse
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"Changes in land use leave tell-tale traces in sedimentary deposits that can be measured. Measuring these traces in drill-cores allows us to reconstruct what people were doing in the landscape over long periods of time," Associate Professor Penny said.

In a new study published in the prestigious *PNAS* journal, Associate Professor Penny and co-authors show that evidence for forest disturbance, soil erosion and burning all declined in the first decades of the 14th century, suggesting a sustained decline in land-use in the commercial and administrative heart of the ancient city. By the end of the 14th century, the moat was covered in floating swamp vegetation, which indicates that it was no longer being maintained.

The findings suggest Angkor's demise was not a catastrophic collapse caused by the Ayutthayan invasion or by infrastructural failure, but a gradual demographic shift by the urban elite.

"Our study suggests the inhabitants didn't leave Angkor because the infrastructure failed, rather the infrastructure failed (or was not maintained or repaired) because the urban elite had already left," said Associate Professor Penny.
