New research casts doubt on cause of Angkor's collapse
25 February 2019

New University of Sydney research has revealed the ancient Cambodian city of Angkor underwent a gradual decline in occupation rather than an abrupt collapse.

Researchers have long debated the causes of Angkor's demise in the 15th century. Historical explanations have emphasised the role of aggressive neighbouring states, and the abandonment of Angkor in 1431 A.D. has been portrayed as a catastrophic demographic collapse. 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.


Provided by University of Sydney