

Appendix K

Archaeological Setting



APPENDIX K

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SETTING

This summary of the archaeology of Hong Kong is divided into "prehistoric" and "historical" archaeology for clarity.

The Prehistory of Hong Kong

In the Hong Kong context "prehistory" refers to the period pre-dating the arrival of the Han Chinese, in approximately 221 BC. The prehistoric period is divided into the Middle Neolithic Period (4000 - 2500 BC), the Late Neolithic Period (2500 - 1500 BC) and the Bronze Age (1500 - 221 BC). Sites are found in sand bars and on the lower hill slopes within sheltered bays throughout the territory. Sites have also been found on the tops of promontories and the edges of coastal marshes. The main finds from the prehistoric period include ceramic vessels, chipped and polished stone implements, shell, bone and bronze objects and occasional habitation remains in the form of fires and postholes.

The Historic Period of Hong Kong

The early historic periods (221 BC - 220 AD) are not well represented in Hong Kong : little has been found from the Qin Dynasty and Southern Yue Kingdom; Han Dynasty material is present in the form of isolated finds, several sites and, most notably, in the form of the Lei Cheng Uk Han Tomb in Kowloon. Similarly, few artefacts have been recovered dated to the Six Dynasties and Sui Dynasty (222 – 618 AD). It is with the arrival of the Tang dynasty (618 – 907 AD) that evidence appears of rapid growth in the local economy. The sea route to Guangzhou passed through the territory and a garrison was positioned at Tuen Mun to protect the maritime trade. Many sites have been found dating to this period, particularly lime kilns in coastal areas. In the Song dynasty (960 –1279 AD) immigration from China brought the main clans into the rural areas of the New Territories. A very limited number of archaeological sites of the Song dynasty have been found; several burials, sherds and coin caches and evidence of a customs post and lime production. In the Yuan dynasty (1271 – 1368 AD) the economy relied on salt production and pearl harvesting in Tolo Harbour and Deep Bay; both government controlled. Only one site has been found, at Ha Lo Wan on Chek Lap Kok with iron refining kilns. During the Ming dynasty (1368 – 1644 AD) the local economy continued to prosper with salt production, incense tree plantations and pearl harvesting. Archaeological evidence includes a pottery kiln site at Wun Yiu in Tai Po and trade ceramic deposits at Penny's Bay, Lantau. The Qing dynasty (1644 – 1911 AD) brought the disruption of the Evacuation Order (1662 – 1669 AD). After repeal, the Hakka arrived to add to the depleted population, occupying less fertile lands. Pearl, salt and incense production declined and the economy shifted to more fishing and farming, and the growth of market towns, such as those at Tai Po, Yuen Long and Sheung Shui. Archaeological remains have been found of forts and batteries built in the Qing dynasty to strengthen coastal defences against pirates. Remains have also been excavated of farmsteads and fields.

To date, archaeological evidence has been found primarily in less developed parts of Hong Kong, where survey and excavation are more easily conducted. This evidence shows that archaeological sites are widely distributed across the territory, particularly in coastal areas.

This fact would suggest that there is also considerable potential for such sites within the urban areas.

The Modern Setting

At the onset of the British occupation in the 1860s, reclamation on the Kowloon Peninsula was conducted under the guidelines of the government. Often reclamation was set as a condition of land purchase (Hudson, 1970). Although much of the Kowloon Peninsula was outlined for military development, the Governor Sir Hercules Robinson, was keen to see some of the land used for commercial purposes, particularly those adjoining deep water. Major reclamations had been undertaken in the study areas by the 1920s; these were followed by major road building and rapid industrial development. (Bristow, 1984: 31)

The present setting of the study area is one of dense urban development and road networks.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES IN THE STUDY AREA

The urban setting described above has characterised the study area for the recent past. As a result, no archaeological examination of any kind has been undertaken. The excavation of the original landforms in this part of Tsim Sha Tsui is seen by the (AMO) as a valuable opportunity for data collection in this area.

The possibility exists that two types of archaeological deposit may exist beneath the pavements of the study area: