2011 Archaeological Investigation

In August, an investigation proposal and budget had been submitted to Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO), LCSD, the subvention in amount of HK$125,000 was then approved by the AMO for the archaeological field investigation. The investigation will be carried out at San Tau archaeological site at Tung Chung, Lantau Island between 10 Nov and 11 Dec 2011. Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) will be adopted in this field survey on 1 Nov 2011.

Dr. Mick Atha was appointed as a leader of the field investigation; a license was applied for this field investigation. Members are welcome to participate in this investigation, transportation allowance HK$100 per day will be offered for member while he or she is working for investigation on site, ceiling of allowance for each member volunteer is HK$300. Please send an e-mail to the Society (hkarch1967@yahoo.com.hk) to joint this survey.

Introduction

The San Tau Archaeological Site (STAS – AMO Ref: AM96-0772) is located at the western side of Tung Chung Bay on the north coast of Lantau Island, and facing Chek Lap Kok Airport (Figures 1 & 2). The STAS is in general considered to be an excellent choice for the HKAS field project because the Tung Chung area, including the original island of Chek Lap Kok and the adjacent coastline of North Lantau, has previously produced significant and important archaeological remains of prehistoric, earlier and later historical periods (e.g. Meacham 1993; Drewett 1995). More specifically, although the STAS has seen relatively little fieldwork, it has already provided indications that it contains localised areas of high archaeological potential, which require fuller definition, in particular on the backbeach north of Kau Liu-Tin Sam.

Overview & Objectives

Based on previous archaeological results and the findings of the initial site visit, it is proposed that the HKAS study area be focused on the backbeach area north of Kau Liu-Tin Sam as highlighted in red in Figure 2. However, given the rather limited scale and coverage of previous fieldwork, it is suggested that the project should adopt a survey-cum-excavation methodology. This will comprise a series of c.1.5x1.5m test pits extending outwards from the known deposit areas – the extent of which will be redefined based on the survey findings, followed by open-area excavations of the early historical and prehistoric deposits. NB: Given the loose, sandy nature of the target deposits, auger testing is not considered to be a particularly useful technique in this particular case. The methodology is thus designed to address a series of research objectives as follows:
1. To establish the fuller extent of the Tang-Song and prehistoric deposit areas;
2. To establish the spatial relationship, if any, between the Tang-Song and prehistoric deposit areas;
3. To more fully define the character of Tang dynasty activity and assess the degree of continuity or change exhibited between it and the overlying Song horizon;
4. To more fully define the character of prehistoric activity and the sequence of deposits;
5. To maximise information retrieval, especially from sealed contexts (such as graves) through the use of appropriate recovery methods (i.e. dry sieving and/or flotation);
6. To reveal something of the environmental context for each of the main periods through suitable sampling methodologies.

Methodology

Survey Grid

As shown in Figure 2, it is proposed to have the study area origin at its south-west corner (grid reference 809750E: 816850N) and then set out the survey and excavation areas relative to an E-W orientated baseline with an origin at
Based on the recorded locations of previous interventions, it is expected that such a baseline would pass through the northern edge of the known early historical deposit to the west and immediately south of the known prehistoric focus to the east. The baseline is thus ideally located for the laying out of survey grids within which both areas can then be investigated. Although a 5m grid is shown for reference in Figure 6, it is expected that, subject to the results of initial small-scale testing, excavations will be conducted within a wider open-area format – especially in the western area with Tang burials.

Test Pit Survey
Based on the patterning of findings from previous fieldwork, two areas of known archaeological potential can be roughly plotted onto the study area map (see cream coloured shading on Figure 6). In order to better define the horizontal extent of the Tang-Song and Neolithic-Bronze period deposits, it is proposed that a series of ten small test pits (c.1.5 x 1.5m) are excavated as shown on the aforementioned plan (pink squares).

Open-area excavation
It is proposed to use an open-area excavation methodology once the extent and character of the two deposit areas has been established. The latter approach is particularly effective for the investigation of inhumation cemeteries, where it is crucially important that multiple, potentially inter-cutting, graves can be identified and defined in plan. Suitable baulks will of course be retained for recording and access purposes, but the density of baulk area in 5m gridded excavation is perhaps counter-productive in this instance. Having said that, depending on the findings of initial testing in the eastern area, something closer to a gridded approach may in fact be more suitable there. The final trench design and extent will, of course, have to be determined on site once better information is available regarding the archaeological resource, the duration of the fieldwork and the site staffing levels available throughout the project.

Post Excavation Analysis and Reporting
The excavated materials and site archive will be processed, analysed and written up in line with the appended AMO guidelines. It is expected that there will be two forms of reporting resulting from the fieldwork: a site report to be produced and submitted to the AMO within two months of completion of the fieldwork and another report to be published in the next available issue of the *Journal of the Hong Kong Archaeological Society*.
Figure 2 1:1000 map showing study area (red outline) overlain with 5m grid for reference. Previous fieldwork colour codes and symbols as per Figure 5. Areas of known archaeological potential are shown with cream shading; pink squares indicate suggested locations of Survey Stage 1 test pits (1.5 x 1.5m). Scale: study area 50 x 130m; north as indicated. Map data: Lands Department (2011); © Hong Kong SAR Government
Figure 3: Study area geology with San Tau Archaeological Site (blue outline) and Kau Liu-Tin Sam study area in red.

Study area geology comprises: Qb = beach deposits including backbeach, Qd = slope debris, Qa = alluvium. For scale, study area is 130 x 50m in size; north as indicated. GEO (1994); © Hong Kong SAR Government