

Sculptures from Stone Age found



Carving depicts the feminine form, similar to 'Venus' figurines found from Siberia to the Pyrenees

Rare artefacts have been dug up in Russia.

The site at Zaraysk contained late Stone Age figurines and carvings on mammoth tusks, including a cone-shaped object that was described as a "puzzle" in the journal, *Antiquity*.

Humans underwent a transition from functional tool-making to art and decoration during the Upper Palaeolithic.

The two figurines found buried are of the human form, and presumably female.

From Spain to Siberia, such "Venus" statuettes have been discovered, but their significance continues to be debated among anthropologists.

One of the figurines measures almost 17cm for height while the other stands half as tall.



Mysterious cone-shaped object discovered at Russian site



Bone fragment displays 'oblique cross' pattern of ornamentation

The cone, whose function remains a puzzle, was carved from mammoth ivory; ornamented with details, and has a hole through its core.

Blind Access Museum artefacts

The National Museum in Bangkok has initiated a tour for the blind to touch and feel objects in the museum.

Organised by the blind access team of the National Museum Volunteers (NMV), the session allowed participants to touch Buddha statues, and learn more about Buddhism.

Buddha images are generally not to be touched by the public but the museum has chosen images to help the blind to explore the works with their hands, and develop a more intimate appreciation of their beauty.

A project for blind children between the age of 7 and 12 provided the young visitors the opportunity to discover the skeletons, inscriptions and ceramic shards in the Pre-history Gallery.

The children's hands were guided by curators, who also assisted the little participants in making their own clay pots.

Due to the overwhelming enthusiasm in response to the project, the museum will incorporate the sessions into its regular education programme for blind children and adults.

'Extremely rare' mammoth skull unearthed

The fossilised skull of a steppe mammoth has been found in southern France.

Unearthed in the Auvergne region, the "extremely rare" discovery could fill the gaps of information on the evolution of these large creatures.

The find of an intact skull is rare, although many isolated teeth and some skeletons of steppe mammoth have been discovered.

Paleontologists believe that the well-preserved specimen belongs to a male mammoth which has been estimated to be 3.7 m. tall, and lived during the Middle Pleistocene, approximately 400,000 years ago.

Scientists recognise the crucial importance of the steppe mammoth for understanding mammoth evolution as it represents the transition between the ancient mammoth and the more recent woolly species. Up till now, not much is known about this transitional stage of their evolution.

'Bizarre' feathered dinosaur discovered

The fossil of a feathered dinosaur has been uncovered in China.

Found in sediments dated to about 168-152 million years ago, at the Daohugou beds, in Nincheng County, Inner Mongolia, the fossil belongs to a primitive, bird-like dinosaur *Epidexipteryx*.



Epidexipteryx possessed amazing physical features

The pigeon-sized flight-less dinosaur lived in a time shortly before *Archaeopteryx*, which is the oldest known bird discovered and which lived some 125 million years ago. The *Archaeopteryx* and several other feathered dinosaurs have been found at the well-known fossil site in Laioning province in China.



The new species is the earliest known to have features as ornament

Adding to the complexity of the early history of the time when little carnivorous two-footed dinosaurs evolved into birds, the fossil may shed more light on the evolutionary transition.

Large fossil site found in Thailand

A site in Kalasin, Thailand, where abundant dinosaur fossils are located has been made

known. The fossils, some of which estimated to be 150 million years old, were unearthed in Kham Muang, close to the Phu Phan mountain range.

Fossils of sauropods, theropods, and ancient crocodiles and fish were found.

Reports indicate that over a hundred fossils had been discovered.

The site was a new discovery, following the find at Phu Kum Khao, which contains one of the largest fossil deposits in Southeast Asia.

Sediments show previous Tsunami

Research has revealed that the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004 was not the first of its magnitude to hit the region.

Sediments sampled in both Thailand and Sumatra show that there was evidence of sediment laid down by a huge tsunami between 600 and 700 years ago, before written and oral documentation exist.

The surge of a tsunami draws a great amount of sediment inland, and in locations where such deposits are not disturbed by wind or water, they provide a historical record of these phenomenal events.

The two teams examining the sediments found a deep sandy layer underneath the surface, matching the layer of sand above from the tsunami of 2004. The buried sand layers in both countries were radio-carbondated to 600-700 years ago.

Those buried layers were located as far as those on the surface, indicating that the tsunami which generated them centuries ago was about the same size as that of 2004.

Ancient 'Hebrew' script 'oldest' ever found

Archaeologists in Israel claim that ancient script on a shard of pottery could be the oldest example of Hebrew writing ever found.

The script on the shard was dated 3,000 years, and are of the proto-Canaanite type which predates the Hebrew alphabet, and by 1,000 years that of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

A teenager involved in an excavation made the discovery at the Khirbet Qeiyafa site about 20 km south-west of Jerusalem.

The site overlooks the Elah valley where David of Israel battled Goliath, the giant of Philistines, leading archaeologists to believe that the find could yield new information on the period of King David's reign.

Hidden painting in painting

An art collector has discovered that a painting hidden inside the frame of a Joan Eardly artwork is worth four times as much as the painting in which it was found.

The unidentified buyer bought the drawing 'Boy with Big Boots' by artist Joan Eardley for £22,500, and took it for cleaning. After the frame was removed, another oil painting was found.

It is believed that the young boy depicted in the hidden picture was drawn by Eardley, and based on one of her favourite models, Andrew Samson.

The new Scottish owner of both the 1950s works intends to keep them in his collection.

Following Eardley's major exhibition at the National Gallery of Scotland in Edinburgh in 2007, the value of her artwork has increased.

Remains of ice-age rhino dug up

The fossils of an ice-age rhinoceros have been excavated at a Gloucestershire water park.

Organised by the Cotswold Water Park Society, the fossilised carcass was discovered near Cirencester during a fossil hunt which included a 5-year-old girl.



Five-year-old girl helped excavate ancient rhino

BBC News reported that she found and helped to dig up the atlas vertebra of the woolly rhinoceros, which lived some 50,000 years ago.

The team of fossils hunters made their discovery while searching a graved pit at the Cotswold Water Park.

They also unearthed the remains of an ice-age deer and belemnites as well as squid-like creatures belonging to the Jurassic era (about 150 m years ago).

Visit Ancient Rome through Google Earth

Google is using its Google Earth to let users visit a virtual ancient Rome.

Through the 3D map tool, visitors can access the Colosseum, Basilica or Forum of Julius Caesar.

Google has reconstructed the huge city which is inhabited by over 1m people.

The project involved scholars, architects, artists and centuries of knowledge and research. Past Perfect Productions reconstructed the archaeological and historical sites through virtual reality.

Google's blog puts the number of buildings at over 6,700 in the model. More than 250 place marks are linked to key sites in various languages.

The 3D models are based on the *Plastico di Roma Antica*, which is a physical model of the city, and created by archaeologists and model-makers between 1933 and 1974.

The Plastico di Roma Antica is kept in a special gallery in Rome's Museum of Roman Civilisation.

Remains of Copernicus identified

Astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus' skeleton, which was found in Poland, has been identified and verified.

Experts compared the DNA from the skeleton and strands of hair lodged in a book in Sweden.



Computer reconstruction of Copernicus from skull found in Poland

The book once belonged to him, and stored in the Uppsala University. Archaeologists excavated the skeleton three years ago in a cathedral where Copernicus lived.

In the 16th Century, Copernicus worked in the Frombork Cathedral on the Baltic Sea coast.

A skull and partial remains were unearthed near an altar at the cathedral; for centuries, the final resting place of the astronomer was a mystery.

Copernicus has been known as the father of modern astronomy. He discovered that the earth orbits the sun.

Oldest family unearthed

The remains of a woman, man, and two youngsters have been dug up from a 4,600-year-old burial site in Germany.

At Eulau, Saxony-Anhalt, four multiple Stone-Age graves, dated to the same time, yielded adults and children buried facing each other.

DNA tests establish the family of father, mother and their children, and experts believe that they make up the oldest family known.

Researchers studied the strontium levels in the teeth of the skeletons, and found that the females might have had grown up in a different area from the males and children.

Strontium is found in rocks and soils, and is taken in from food as teeth develop during childhood; it can reveal the area that the people came from.

They are thought to belong to a Stone Age group known as the Corded Ware Culture.

Islamic art finds museum

Islamic art has been gaining popularity, particularly over the last few years when prices for Islamic works rose dramatically in London auction houses.

BBC News reported that the phenomenon was attributed to the collection spree of the al-Thani family which rule Qatar.



Islamic art museum in Doha

The rulers of the small Middle-eastern country, that is rich in gas, had engaged renown architect IM Pei to design a spectacular museum in Doha to house their collection of the finest Islamic art.

Opened in November, the Islamic architecture-influenced museum displays 800 of the best Islamic objects of art.

In Abu Dhabi, two museums – branches of the Louvre and Guggenheim – have been planned.



Islamic artefact

It is thought that the museum in Qatar will need to establish itself as a centre of education and research on the history of Islamic works if it is not to become merely a collection of glittering art.

Pompeii in danger

The ancient Roman town of Pompeii is being gradually worn away, reports *Reuters Life*.

Pompeii was buried and preserved after a volcanic eruption approximately 2,000 years ago.

Neglect, tourism and climatic effects over the years are destroying one of the world's top archaeological sites and Italy's most famous tourist attraction. Each year, 2.5 million visitors toured the site.

For a long time, archaeologists and historians have cautioned that the frescoes, roofs, walls and treasures in Pompeii would not survive if maintenance was not improved.

The archaeological site presents a unique observation of life in a Roman town in AD 79 when Mount Vesuvius erupted.

Since excavations started 250 years ago, two thirds of the 66-hectare site has been excavated, and not enough has been done to prevent deterioration of the artefacts, which are crumbling.

In August 2008, a "state of emergency" at Pompeii has been declared by the Italian government, seeking funds and urgent protective measures.

Experts, however, insist that meticulous daily upkeep – and not temporary interventions – is needed.

Looting and vandalism have also contributed to the vulnerability of the site, where tourists can make off with antiquities, and damage ancient wells and mosaics.

Taj Mahal copy in Bangladesh

Bangladesh's own Taj Mahal has been built by a Bangladesh film-maker.

He hopes that for those in his country who are too poor to travel, they can experience the beauty of the original monument in India.

The Taj Mahal of India



The Taj was constructed by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan in the 17th Century as a tomb for his wife. He is buried next to her in the building located in the northern city of Agra.

It took 20,000 builders and 20 years to complete the Taj.

Situated in the countryside of Bangladesh, the US\$58m life-sized replica required five years to build.

Marble and granite from Italy and diamonds from Belgium were imported for the construction. The dome of the monument used 160 kg of bronze.

Indian authorities have expressed their resentment, insisting that investigation would be carried out to determine if copyright laws had been violated.

Christ's perfumes discovered

Excavation in Magdala, the biblical town in what is now Israel, yielded perfumed ointments similar to those that may have been used to wash the feet of Jesus by the woman, Mary Magdalene, as described in the bible.

Franciscan archaeologists unearthed the intact vials of perfume at the bottom of a swimming pool filled with mud.

According to the New Testament, Mary is a disciple of Christ; she is thought to be the sinner who anointed his feet.

Migdal, an Israeli town, now occupies the northern region of Israel where Magdala was an ancient city close to the Sea of Galilee.

The archaeologists are members of Studium Biblicum Franciscanum which focuses on archaeological exploration of sites connected to the New Testament and early Christianity in the Middle East.

‘Oldest human brain’ unearthed

Archaeologists have dug up the remains of what may be the oldest surviving human brain in Britain.

A skull has been excavated at a York University site where farming first took place 2,000 years ago, an area of extensive prehistoric agriculture, trackways and monuments dating back to about 300 BC.

The contents in the skull were scanned, and neurologists believe that they could be fossilised brain.

Discovered on its own in a muddy pit, archaeologists think that it may have been an offering for a rite.

Peru finds ancient ‘Wari’ city

The ruins of an entire city have been found in Peru.

Researchers say that the discovery may provide the missing link between two ancient cultures, the Wari civilisation and that of the Moche, which lasted between 100 AD and 600 AD.

Located near the city of Chiclayo, the site probably dates to the Wari culture which ruled the Andes of modern Peru between the 7th and 12th Century, *Reuters* reported.

The ancient city, spreading over 5 km, was once buried.

Evidence of human sacrifice were uncovered at the site, including ceramics, clothing and the well-preserved remains of a young woman.

Pre-Inca mummy found

A mummy believed to belong to the ancient Wari tribe has been extracted from a tomb by archaeologists in the Huaca Pucllana site in Peru.

The excavated area is the first intact Wari burial site ever unearthed at Huaca Pucllana in Lima.

Researchers dated it to about 700 AD. The Wari culture flourished before the emergence of the Incas; for approximately half a millennium, its tribe inhabited and ruled Peru between 600 AD and 1100 AD.

The female mummy had also been found with the remains of two other adults and a child. For the Wari people, it was common for children to be sacrificed, and their bodies were often discovered with the dead adults.

Tourist digs up gold

An amateur archaeologist has found about 300 gold coins outside the Old City of Jerusalem, say *BBC News*.

The British woman, Nadine Ross, discovered solid 24-carat coins under a big rock in a car park.

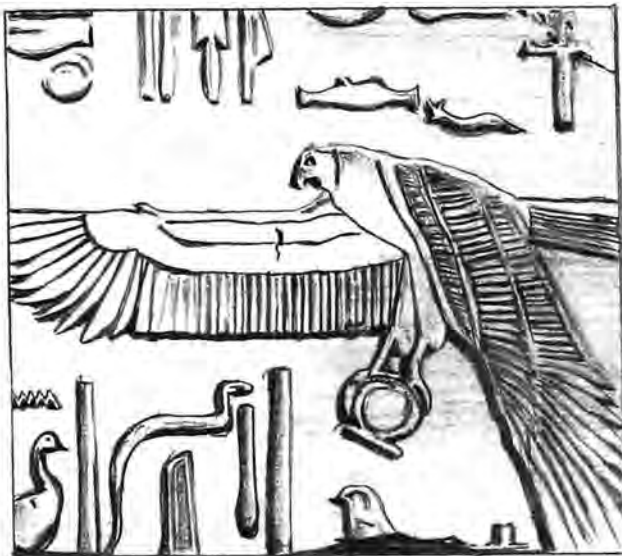
Her haul is now considered one of the largest coin hoards ever found in Jerusalem.

Miss Ross, who is an engineer for BMW, had been volunteering at the site when she made the discovery.

The coins depict Roman Emperor Heraclius, and date to the 7th Century reign of the Byzantine emperor.

Man charged with smuggling mummies

An Australian man has been arrested for smuggling mummies found in his luggage by security personnel at Cairo airport.



In ancient Egypt, the falcon-headed god Horus was a revered icon

The mummies are those of a cat and long-beaked bird, the ibis, dating to 300BC.

Nineteen figurines of ancient Egyptian gods were also found in his bag.

The accused has been charged with smuggling antiquities, which carries a penalty of up to 15 years imprisonment.

Cats, ibises and falcons, among other animals, are regarded as deities in ancient Egypt, and thousands of mummified animals and animal figurines have been discovered from Egypt's Late Period, between 330 BC and 30 BC.

Drawings behind da Vinci's painting

Unknown drawings on the back of a painting by Leonardo da Vinci were discovered by a Louvre Museum curator.

It happened by chance when Louvre staff took Leonardo's 'The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne' off the museum wall.

A curator noticed drawings on the back of the painting which was made on wood, depicting the head of a horse and half a skull.

The museum carried out subsequent tests, with infrared technology, and photographs revealed that there were three drawings. The other drawing illustrates Jesus as a child, playing with a lamb.

Fossil shows turtle's shell evolution

The discovery of a fossil in China indicates how the turtle's shell might have evolved.

Dug up near Guangling, the 220-million-year-old find is considered the predecessor of modern turtles.

The astonishingly intact fossil reveals that the turtle's breast plate grew earlier than the other parts of the shell.



Ancestral turtles from the Triassic Period

Named *Odontochelys semitestacea*, meaning half-shelled turtle with teeth, the fossilised turtle is believed to have inhabited the coastal shallows or river deltas.

It was discovered in the Nanpanjiang trough basin, south-west China.

Pushing back the species' first known appearance on earth by about 10 million years, they might have originated in water and not land.

The turtle has appeared as they are today since the era of dinosaurs.

Researchers also discovered other fossilised marine reptiles and invertebrates in the same place where the turtle fossil had been.

Illustration by Sakulchat Chatrakul Na Ayutthaya