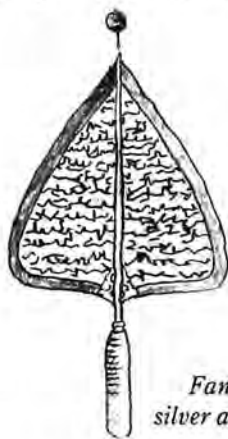


Islamic Art of Southeast Asia on show

The National Gallery of Australia is holding an exhibition through May to engender a debate on what Islamic art is. 'Crescent Moon: Islamic Art and Civilization in Southeast Asia' presents splendid gold court jewelry, batiks, Korans, textiles, etc. in recognition of the fact that much of the diverse art from Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Myanmar) is Islamic.



*Fan, made of gold,
silver and precious stones*

The *International Herald Tribune* reported that the highlight of the show is the display of Indonesian and Malaysian manuscripts with gold illumination, including a 19th century Koran from Aceh, which was considered the most powerful Islamic Kingdom in 16th century Southeast Asia.

Other outstanding items are textiles from Cirebon (on the north coast of Java), and those that carry little relationship to Islam as a religion, but are rich in colour with intricate motifs; and Indonesian shadow puppets that were used to preserve the Hindu epic, Ramayana, in the context of a region converting to Islam.

Old, old canals

Archaeologists in Peru claimed that they have discovered the oldest known irrigation canals in South America. Four sites in the Zaba Valley (the Andean foothills) were found to have canals that are about 5,300 years old.

The findings, reported in an issue of 'The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences', present evidence to support enduring archaeological specu-

lations that the development of early civilization in Peru depended on irrigation.

The silt-filled canals, under layer of sediments, were carbon-dated and believed to have been used to irrigate cultivated fields more than 5,000 years ago.

Peru is considered one of the few places on earth where a complex society developed with minimal outside influence. During the same time the Egyptians were building their pyramids, the Peruvians were constructing their canals.

Finding Ajax

Researchers are verifying the legend of Trojan War hero, Ajax, by studying the ruins of a 3,200-year-old palace near Athens.

The remains of the palace, measuring 750m², were discovered in 1999 by archaeologist Yiannis Lalos when he was hiking on the Salamis Island. Excavations have been undertaken during the last six years.

Lalos, who is professor of archaeology at Ioannina University, was reported by *AP* to be confident about the site being Ajax's capital.

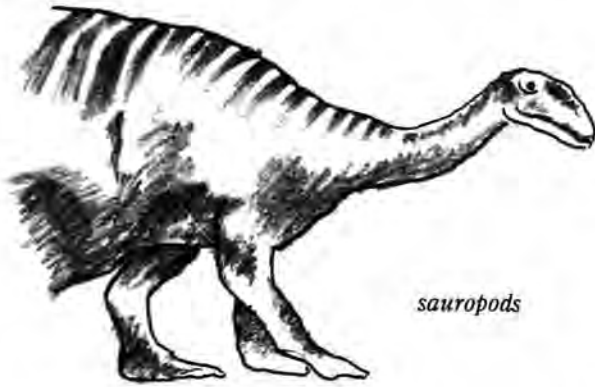
According to legend, Greek warrior-king Ajax was one of most prominent soldiers in the army that seized the city of Troy, and rescued the abducted Sparta queen, Helen. In Homer's 'Iliad,' Ajax committed suicide following a conflict with other Greek leaders.

To date, archaeologists have unearthed 33 rooms in the palace, including pottery stone tools, a seal stone and copper implements.

Dinosaur fossils unearthed

After workers unearthed dinosaur fossils, construction of a highway in the northeast of Thailand was suspended so that excavation could be carried out. Geologists said that the fossils were found in three large deposits near the Phu Phan mountain range.

They believed that the remains might belong to the '*Phuwiangosaurus Sirindhornae*' family of dinosaurs which were of the herbivorous Sauropod type, aged about 120-150 million years old, and lived in the area during the Jurassic period.



Sauropods are huge creatures which were several metres tall, and lumber about with long necks.

Prior to the arrival of the excavation team, however, many fossil pieces had already been looted by villagers.

No restoration of Bamiyan Buddhas

Half a year before the 2001 hijacked plane attacks in the USA, the Bamiyan Buddhas, carved out of rock in Afghanistan, were destroyed by the Taliban rulers. The giant statues, a World Heritage Site, were damaged by machine-gun fire, and blown up.

Unesco has been in charge of preserving the site since the Taliban were toppled in 2001, but there are no plans to reconstruct the statues. Rebuilding is estimated at the cost of US\$30 million, and the lack of funds has been cited as a major obstacle to reconstruction.

The statues, which were carved by Buddhist monks in the 6th century, stood at 38 and 55 metres out of the cliff face.

Most expensive photo

A photograph by Edward Stretcher became the highest priced photograph auctioned, *AP* reported the announcement by Sotheby's.

'The Pond-Moonlight,' a shot of a pond in a wooded area reflecting light, was sold for over US\$2.9 million. The photograph was taken on Long Island in 1904.

Richard Prince's 'Untitled (Cowboy)' held the previous record when it was auctioned for US\$1,248,000.

Cave art in France

The Culture Ministry of France was reported by AFP to have said that prehistoric cave art dating from 25,000 B.C. were discovered in November 2005 in Western France. The cave art is many thousand years older than those at the famed Lascaux site, dating from about 17,000 BC, which was discovered in 1940.

Gerard Jourdy, a 63-year-old amateur potholer, made his find at the village of Vilhonneur, 20 kilometres east of Angouleme. He entered the cave through a hole which local farmers used to dispose of dead livestock.

The northern slopes of the Pyrenees, as well as the western slopes of the Massif Central mountain range, have the largest concentrations of Palaeolithic (stone age) sites.

Museum tour for the blind

Do the Blind visit museums? Yes. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art recently conducted an innovative tour which is part of programmes at over 100 museums in the United States. The tour provides participants the opportunity to touch exhibits made of slate and marble. Trained guides will also assist the visually-impaired to feel 500-year-old Spanish tomb covers, an Italian bust of John the Baptist and several sculptures of Henry Moore. The guides will ask participants questions about their perceptions, and offer historical facts on the pieces.

In the 70s, museums in America started to reach out to those without sight, but such programmes were offered by only a few museums. Among the first was the Philadelphia Museum of Art which initiated the 'Form in Art' programme, including in it the study of art history, tactile examinations of objects, etc.. For paintings, the museum made reproductions that might copy the texture or brush strokes.

In New York, the Museum of Modern Art has been organizing touch tours for more than 30 years now. They allow visitors to touch masterpieces by Picasso, Matisse and Rodin.

AP reported that John Kennedy, a University of Toronto at Scarborough professor whose 1993 book,

'Drawing and the Blind', is regarded as the seminal work on the topic, said that those without sight can often understand art as well as those with full vision.

Museum mishap destroys vases

Imagine the scene: a visitor in a museum trips on his loosen shoelace, tumbles down the stairs, and crashes into priceless Qing Dynasty vases. You may think it is something from an episode of Mr. Bean, but it was an accident that happened to Nick Flynn, according to Agencies sources.

The damage to the rare 300-year-old Chinese ceramics at the Fitzwilliam museum in Cambridge, England was estimated at US\$100,000.

Dating from the late 17th or early 18th century, the artefacts had been donated to the museum, and for about 40 years, they were its most well-known exhibits. Mr. Flynn, who was not injured in the accident, received a letter from the museum which advised him not to visit the museum, at least for a while. The museum said they were determined to glue the pieces together.

Watch those shoelaces while you're in a museum.

Cultured woman pagan man

While women become increasingly more cultured in the arts, men are turning into TV sports-couch invalids. Is this a realistic scenario that portends a worrisome future?

Two recent reports by the French government provoke much thought on the matter. 'The Feminization of Cultural Practices' illustrates the "culture gap" between the sexes, based on polls taken between 1973 and 2003. The other report, 'The Gender Factory of Cultural Taste,' analyzes the education within families.

The *International Herald Tribune* said that both reports indicate a fundamental change occurring since the 1960s in terms of the profile of cultural "consumers". Women read more books, visit more libraries, theatres, museums and art exhibitions and attend more performing arts events, making them the major "consumers" of art and culture. Their number is predicted to grow in greater disparity to men.

Some of the reasons cited as cause for the situation include: female sensitivity; women having more leisure time and a more arts-oriented education; their being less obsessive with making money, and appreciating more the value in nurturing their children with culture. Women in France are better educated than men today. More of them are in higher education, manage better, and more inclined toward humanities studies and work related to the arts.

This "feminization" of culture is across over Europe for both adults and children, even though traditions and development of different societies vary.

Nevertheless, in most countries, men remain the main holders of power in the culture industry, such as theatres, opera houses, orchestras, etc.. A small number of women administer the arts and cultured institutions, which would lose out if these institutions fail to take into consideration women's increasing role in the development of culture and its markets too.

As for the blokes, well, time to surrender the remote controls, and also help turn the kids away from an overdependence on television, video games and internet surfing.

Most expensive Ming vase

A pear-shaped Ming vase belonging to the Hong Wu period (1368-1398), was auctioned at a record price, US\$10 million, at Christie's in Hong Kong.

The Yuhu chungping vase of the early Ming Dynasty is now owned by Steve Wynn, a casino mogul in Las Vegas. The bid holds the world record now for any Ming porcelain.

Hong Kong has today replaced Tokyo as the Asian focus of the world art market, with wealthy Chinese collectors driving the current shift.

Prambanan shaken by earthquake

The May earthquake in Indonesia has severely damaged Prambanan, Indonesia's famous temple complex. Stone blocks and relief carvings were broken, and experts are examining the shrines and foundation of the monuments. The area has been

closed to the public, until damage can be fully assessed, which may take months. Measuring 6.3 in magnitude, the earthquake left up to 200,000 people homeless in Java.

Built around 850 CE, Prambanan is the largest Hindu temple compound in the archipelago. It is also one of the largest Hindu temples in Southeast Asia, and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Thailand and Japan tangle over yoga postures

The Intellectual Property Department (IPO) of Thailand recently requested Japan to revoke trademarks on 'Rusie Dutton' Thai traditional 'hermit' Yoga postures that were granted to a businessman in early 2006.

Two trademarks on the traditional exercise positions were granted to a Japanese Yoga business operator by the Japan Patent Office (JPO), which allow for its commercial use, including advertisements and presentation as a logo for a Thai school in Japan.



A 'Rusie Dutton' figure

The IPO submitted an official objection to the JPO, and hired a Japan-based legal firm for assistance. In terms of evidence, the IPO has many to prove that the 108 'hermit' exercise postures belong to Thailand in the field of alternative medicine. The evidence also includes poems, paintings and Yoga literature.

Minister rues loss of heritage

The Minister of Culture, China, recently apologized for not having done enough to protect the country's historic monuments.

Reuters reported that Sun Jiazheng told a news conference that in modernization, the Chinese should be concerned about their heritage as well. He had been queried about the widespread destruction of Beijing's old buildings and neighborhoods.

The minister acknowledged that rules in estate development were not followed, and protected areas were damaged, and added that he should have done something about it.

Skyscrapers have mushroomed in the capital of China, replacing traditionally low Chinese structures. Similarly, old courtyards have been demolished to make way for blocks of high-rise housings, while others have been transformed into sophisticated residences which demand high rental costs.

Baphuon revived

One of the oldest and largest monuments of the Khmer kingdom is re-emerging, decades after French archaeologists dismantled it piece by piece to reconstruct its collapsing towers and facades. Eleven years ago, French architect Pascal Royere led an Ecole française d'Extreme-Orient team to work on Baphuon again. Earlier work, which had begun in 46 years before, was suspended because of the civil war in Cambodia.

Baphuon, measuring 130m x 104m at its base and about 40m tall, is now partly open to the public. Royere told *AFP* that the massive reconstruction work in Siem Reap may be finished in 2008. He has been assisted by some of the locals who had worked on the project in the 1960s, as well as Efeo architect, Jacques Dumarçay, who supervised the original project.

Baphuon was built in the 11th century by King Udayadityavarman, and stood as the largest temple until Angkor Wat was completed a century later.

Free Museum visits

Museums in Bangkok have launched a scheme which involves the use of a card that would enable its holder to visit 100 museums free of charge.

Known as the 'One card one hundred museums' campaign, it will cover free admission to museums

for card holders for a year, and is sponsored by the Thai Health Foundation.

Six thousand cards will be issued to the general public to promote frequent visit to both private and public museums.

There are 845 museums in Thailand, 184 of which are in the capital. Cultural advisors have urged the government to provide more support to private museums, especially the small and community museums. Calls have also been made for the establishment of a special agency to oversee museums, many of which are struggling with financial difficulties.

Murals provide glimpses of ancient Maya Civilization

At a site in remote northeastern Guatemala, San Bartolo, archaeologists discovered murals in vivid colours, relating to Maya mythology, *NYT News Service* reported.

On sacred walls and within dark passageways of ancient ruins, the discovery (including art masterpieces and ancient Maya writing) contributes immensely to research on Maya civilization during its formative era over 1,000 years before its glorious classic period.

The murals, dated to 100 BC, were located in a pyramid chamber underneath 50 feet of rubble. For two years, the chamber was excavated to uncover the paintings, which depict figures and mythic scenes similar to later Maya art, including those reminiscent of traditional Maya depiction of creation, with the world propped up by trees, their roots hugging the underworld and branches holding the sky.

At present, the text of Maya writing can not be read, but archaeologists are optimistic about finding more such text, with efforts also to search for them at other ruins, such as those around El Mirador.

Prehistoric Rome Skeleton

A well-preserved skeleton of a woman, who lived 3,000 years ago, has been discovered at a site near the forum where Caesar's body was cremated after his assassination 1,000 years ago.

The find has been dated to 300 years before the founding of Rome in 753 BC, when Bronze Age people inhabited the area, but left little evidence of their settlement.

Archaeologists reckoned that the woman died at 30 years old, and was probably of noble class, going by the amber necklace with gold pendant, bronze hair-fastener and finger ring found on her.

Customarily, most prehistoric ancestors of the Romans cremated their deceased and kept their ashes in funerary urns.



The relief of an enthroned Mayan ruler within a carved quatrefoil in a panel discovered in Cancuén, Guatemala.

Tattooed mummy found in Peru

A tattooed mummy discovered in Peru is one of the most outstanding relics of a civilization which ceased some 1,300 years ago, say archaeologists.

The 1,500-year-old mummy, of a woman in her late 20s, was from a site named El Brujo, on the north coast near Trujillo.

Apparently offered as a sacrifice, the girl is believed to be an elite member of the Moche tribe. A rope remains around the skeleton's neck, along with fineries and gold jewellery.

The archaeological team was surprised, however, by the presence of spears and clubs, which suggest that she might have had been a female warrior. An alternative speculation is that the war items were

funeral gifts – bearing symbols of power – offered by men.

Fatwa condemns display of statues

The Mufti, most senior religious scholar in Egypt, has issued a religious ruling, *fatwa*, condemning the display of statues. Islam discourages idolatry and the representations of the human form.

There are, however, an abundance of statues in the temples, museums and major city squares of Egypt where sculpture is as old as the pharaohs.

Critics of the *fatwa* expressed surprise that the issue has been raised at all, reports *BBC News*. It reveals how Egyptians are today dependent on religious rulings on all aspects of life.

The *fatwa* on the display of statues is another example of the growing discrepancy between secular and religious cultures in the country where religion will continue to arbitrate on a wide range of issues in the lives of Egyptians.

Dino in deep

Operators of an offshore oil drilling platform found a dinosaur fossil, the first ever discovered in Norway, 2.3 km below the floor of the North Sea.

The specimen, between 195 and 210 million years old, has been identified as the knucklebone of a plateosaur.

BBC Website was informed that while marine reptile fossils have been recovered from North Sea drill cores, it is rare for a dinosaur bone to be discovered in such a depth.

The fossil was first spotted and retrieved in 1997 by geologists who drilled the core, but it was kept in a drawer on the suspicion that it was plant matter.

After 5 years, it was brought out for a microscopic examination, upon consultation with paleontologists at the University of Bonn, Germany. The specimen was verified as being identical, structurally, to bones of a Plateosaurus species, which is most common in Europe. During existence of this dinosaur species, there was a desert between Norway and Greenland, with meandering rivers crossing through.

European pyramid?

Archaeologists are looking for a pyramid beneath a hill in Bosnia. Excavations in the 650m Visocica had already revealed a small opening to an underground tunnel, which is believed to be man-made, and measures 3.8 km long. It is connected to other tunnels that may lead to two other pyramid-shaped hills shown on satellite photographs and thermal imaging. If a pyramid is eventually located, it will be the first to be found in Europe.

Anthropological evidence suggests that there were 7,000-year-old human settlements in the Visoko valley near the hill, and German archaeologists have recently discovered 24,000 Neolithic artefacts a metre below ground.

The town in the valley was the medieval capital of Bosnia, and a fortress atop the Visocica was used by Bosnian kings. It was constructed over an observation post of the Roman Empire, which had been built on top of the ruins of an ancient settlement.

Dinosaur eggs and other fossils confiscated

Fossils, including three dinosaur eggs worth an estimated US\$4,000 each, were sold at a fossil show in Arizona. US customs agents said that they have seized eight tones of prehistoric fossils after an undercover operation prompted a raid in Tucson where a sale was being held.

The customs agents initiated investigation on a tip from Interpol, which advised that a vendor at the Gem, Mineral and fossil show case in Tucson might be selling fossils that belong to Argentina.

Archaeological discovery from 1815 volcanic eruption

Evidence of what might have been a lost kingdom was found at the site of the devastating volcanic eruption which killed over 100,000 people on the Indonesian Island of Sumbawa in 1815.

An expedition had unearthed the remains of a house with two human bodies buried under ash from the eruption of Mount Tambora. Bronze bowls ceramic pots and other artefacts were also discovered.

The finds were made during a 6-week archaeological excavation in 2004, carried out by Professor Haraldur Sigurdsson of the University of Rhode Island (US), and colleagues from the University of North Carolina (US) together with the Indonesian Directorate of Volcanology.

Sigurdsson, who has been researching the area for 20 years, said that the house was totally carbonized, and the two occupants and their belongings burnt or carbonized too, adding that an entire village was down there.

The team was led to a gully in the jungle (cutting through a deep deposit of volcanic rock and ash) on information that the locals had found ancient objects in the area.

Pottery shards, carbonized wood and bone fragments were among the objects discovered first, leading the archaeological team to the buried house (under 3m) by using radar to scan the underground.

Some of the items, especially the bronze ones, indicate that the Tamborans were wealthy people with links to Vietnam and Cambodia. It has been suggested that their language was related to Mon-Khmer languages.

The explosion of the Tambora volcano is considered one of the most violent in human history. It affected a wide area covering the Maluku islands, Java and parts of Bali and Lombok. About 10,000 people died from the spew of hot gas, ash and rock, and 117,000 perished as a result of diseases, and starvation due to crop failures.

SEAMEO-SPAFA Staff

Contacts for information and enquiries:

Director

Pisit Charoenwongsa pisit@seameo-spafa.org

Advisors

Heng L. Thung hthung@access.inet.co.th
Pradech Phayakvichien spafa@seameo-spafa.org
Vishnu Aimpraneetra spafa@seameo-spafa.org
Samart Sapyen spafa@seameo-spafa.org

Administration

Wilasinee Thabuengkarn wilin@seameo-spafa.org
Vassana Kerdsupap vassana@seameo-spafa.org
Jittipha Jaiboon jittipha@seameo-spafa.org
Pannuwat Taburi montri@seameo-spafa.org
Soros Jenjai spafa@seameo-spafa.org

Finance

Supa Thanasakulprasert supa@seameo-spafa.org

Project Development

Kevin Charles Kettle kevin@seameo-spafa.org

Publication & Computer

Ean Lee ean@seameo-spafa.org
Ratchaporn Tesjeeb ratchy@seameo-spafa.org

Research

Tin Maung Kyi apar@seameo-spafa.org
Nyunt Han spafa@seameo-spafa.org
Tang Fu Kuen tangfukuen@seameo-spafa.org
Patcharawee Tunprawat patchy@seameo-spafa.org
Malcolm Lee Bradford malcolm@seameo-spafa.org
Patsri Tippayaprapai patsri@seameo-spafa.org
Patcharee Kunasarn patcharee@seameo-spafa.org
Alongkorn Jutagate alongkorn@seameo-spafa.org

Audio-Visual

Nipon Sud-Ngam nipon@seameo-spafa.org

GIS

Chutipong Romsonthi spafa@seameo-spafa.org

Library

Wanpen Koogpoon wanpen@seameo-spafa.org
Nawarat Saeng-wat nawarat@seameo-spafa.org