

Rare Cambodian prehistory site destroyed

A 2,500-year-old archaeological site in the Memot region of southeastern Cambodia was completely destroyed in September, news on the Devata website said.

Heng Sophady, a Cambodian archaeologist, inspected the area, and found bulldozers leveling the prehistory site, reportedly to make way for temporary housing for a commercial company nearby.



Cambodian archaeologist Heng Sophady

Located in rural Samrong Village, the ancient site is known as the Samrong Circular Earthwork.

It was discovered in an aerial photo by Professor Yasushi Kojo (Waseda University) in 1997.

The priceless site was destroyed in a few hours.

It was unknown as to who ordered the clearing of the land, but Mr. Heng was informed by site workers that a rubber plantation company would be constructing a new village for workers.

The rural region of Memot offers one of the richest sources of information on prehistory development in the country.

The Khmer Empire, which was a major power in mainland Southeast Asia, is believed to have partly consisted of a lineage leading back to the ancestors of the primitive inhabitants of Memot.

Louis Malleret, the French archaeologist who described a series of 17 circular mounds in Memot, initiated archaeological investigation in 1959.

In 1962, the first local excavation was undertaken by Bernard Philippe Groslier, who called the newly discovered civilisation “Mimotien”.

The Memot area has its archaeological centre, ‘The Memot Centre of Archaeology’, which is in Kampong Cham province.

It is a non-profit research unit of the Department of Archaeology and Prehistory of the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts.

The centre strives to educate local researchers, and train young scholars in excavation, procedures of analysis and treatment, and making site plans.

Source: <http://www.devata.org>

Oldest evidence of arrows discovered

The earliest direct evidence of human-made arrows has been produced by scientists in South Africa.

“Stone points” dated 64,000 years old were unearthed from ancient sediment in Sibudu Cave.

Researchers believe they were arrowheads, and after scrutiny, the weapons revealed blood and bone remains that indicated their use.

They also think that the arrowheads were fastened to wooden shafts with a plant-based resin because traces of glue were detected.

The find adjusted the dating of bow and arrow development a further 20,000 years back.

Led by Professor Lyn Wadley (Witwatersrand University), the excavation team worked on layers deposited up to 100,000 years ago.

Source: Science Reporter

Fossils of oldest animal remains found

Tiny fossils found in South Australia are believed to belong to the earliest animals ever discovered.

The irregularly-shaped fossils of circles, anvils, wishbones and rings were located in the Flinders Rangers, in rocks dated to 640-650 million years, and are most likely sponges; claims for the oldest animal fossils are at least 70 million years younger.

As the fossils were totally lodged in the limestone, and made of the same material, which is calcite, researchers were unable to extract the fossils; they had to cut thin section and digitally recreate the forms to assess their internal structure.

Previously, the oldest known and generally accepted fossilised sponges are estimated to be 520 million years old.

Source: BBC News

Google art project takes off

Virtual tours on a website of the world’s great art galleries are now made possible by Google Street View imaging technology.

Seventeen galleries, including some of the most famous such as New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art, Amsterdam’s Rijksmuseum and Madrid’s Museo Reina Sofía, are taking part in the Google Art Project.

Cameras mounted on specially-designed trolley strolled through deserted galleries to capture 360-degree shots of the interior of selected galleries, and allow smooth online navigation of over 380 museum rooms.

Over a thousand artworks were photographed in “Gigapixel” high-resolution, which would enable a custom-built zoom viewer to offer views in breathtaking microscopic detail.

The Internet experience is also enhanced by “info panels” that provide brief history of artists, and other information.

Google said it planned to expand the site in the following years.

Source: Bangkok Post

Archaeologists unearth Britain’s ‘oldest house’

British archaeologists have discovered a lakeside 3.5-metre diameter circular structure in North Yorkshire at the Star Carr site, which is believed to have been occupied by returning hunter-gatherers around 11,000 years ago after the glaciers of the ice age had retreated.

BBC News reports that the remains were dated by radiocarbon, and the house is believed to be from 8,500 BC, 500 years earlier than the previous oldest house (in Howick, Northumberland).

The discovery of this settlement provides a new insight into the life of inhabitants on this Mesolithic-era site. They were thought to have been very mobile and nomadic. This smaller version of an iron-age round house changes that perception entirely.

It is believed that the house was rebuilt over time, and was inhabited for a period of between 200 and 500 years. This suggests attachment to the site throughout the generations, and there were most likely other similar houses in the area.

Over the decades, the incredibly rare site also yielded large number of items, such as a paddle of a boat, arrow tips, masks and head-dresses. One of the most significant finds is a wooden platform, made from split timbers, which is being considered as the oldest example of carpentry found in Europe.

Archaeologists described the latest find as a 'sensational discovery' that altered the traditional understanding of hunter-gatherers, and opened a new door to the research into European ancestry.

Source: BBC News

Bruegel painting uncovered by restorers in Spain

The Prado museum of Madrid has revealed that a Pieter Bruegel the Elder painting has been found.

They were asked by private owners to prove its authenticity, and through an X-ray, fragments of the artist's signature at the bottom of the painting were visible.

The tableau, painted in tempera on linen, is called 'The Wine of St. Martin's Day'. It depicts a great number of peasants scrambling to get some wine from the first barrel of the season, a classic theme for Bruegel.

This large-scale painting, not known previously, dates between 1565 and 1568, and measures 148cm x 270.5cm.

The owners of the painting were not aware of its rarity until they put it on sale last year. It is reported to be worth over 25 million euros in the art market. The Spanish Culture Minister hopes to secure it for the nation at an undisclosed sum.

There are only forty known Bruegels before this discovery, and The Prado has one in their collection, entitled 'The Triumph of Death'.

Source: BBC News

3D virtual Monuments and Museums

Images on Flickr websites were used to recreate three-dimensional models of well-known landmarks such as the Colosseum in Rome.

Analysed by a home personal computer, million of photos were compiled to construct detailed models within a day.

Researchers at the University of Washington worked on a personal computer equipped with four powerful graphic cards that were



The Colosseum

instrumental in performing massive number calculations.

The analyses involved studying an object from various viewing angles and distances, and the details of each pixel within the set of photos to examine surfaces.

Virtual museums too are increasing on the Internet, with the complex technology needed to create them becoming more sophisticated.

Graphic designers are today capable of constructing entire museum worlds on the web.

Source: Bangkok Post

Crop marks in fields expose Roman sites

Archaeologists had taken full advantage of the dry weather to excavate Roman camps and pre-historic settlements in England.

Three sides of a Roman camp were revealed in Dorset after sun-parched barley fields grew at different rates, producing marks over settlements buried underneath. Crop marks showed a lightly-built defensive enclosure that protected Roman soldiers in their manoeuvres during the first century AD, the English Heritage reported.

Another Roman camp was found in Newton Kyme, near Tadcaster in North Yorkshire, but compared to the one in Dorset, this larger and stronger fort dates back further at nearly 2000 years.

With dry conditions being ideal, archaeologists have discovered hundreds of ancient sites by aerial surveys. Flying over the Holderness area of the East Riding, about 60 new sites that were mainly prehistoric, along with livestock and settlement enclosures, were located and identified in a single day.

Source: BBC News

Van Gogh theft: Egyptian ministry officials jailed

An Egyptian court has found eleven Ministry of Culture employees guilty of negligence, and sentenced them to three years in jail, with bail pending an appeal.

After a Van Gogh painting, known both as 'Poppy Flowers' and 'Vase and Flowers' went missing for the second time from the Mahmud Khalil museum, investigations revealed that the alarms on paintings did not function; only seven of the forty-three security cameras were operational, and only one guard was on duty during the theft.

The security problems were allegedly reported but the request for upgrading the system was met with insufficient financial support from the Minister of Culture. The Minister denies the claims.

When the robbery first came to light, two Italian visitors were mistakenly arrested after they aroused suspicions by visiting the toilet, and rapidly leaving the premises soon after entering.

This led to a few ill-informed announcements from the Minister of Culture, one of which was that the painting has been recovered. He later retracted the statement, and the painting is still missing today.

An Egyptian billionaire has offered a US\$175,000 reward for any information leading to the recovery of the precious painting.

Source: BBC News

Italian PM 'enhances' Venus and Mars statues

The Italian Prime Minister has been severely criticised for ordering restoration work on two ancient Roman marble statues.

The restoration practice of Italian restorers avoids restoring ancient works of art to perfection, in contravention of which Mr. Berlusconi authorised the replacement of the missing penis on Mars, as well as the missing hand for Venus.



Venus and Mars

The out-of-fashion restoration approach costs more than 73,000 euros (\$100,00) to carry out, and it clearly upset the prime minister's dissenters, particularly as he had ordered massive budget cuts of more than 40% to Italy's fine arts department as part of an austerity programme.

Previously kept in a Rome museum, the statues of Venus and Mars were moved to the PM's private residence.

Source: BBC News

SEARCA INVITES APPLICATIONS FOR GRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP IN AGRICULTURE FOR SCHOOL YEAR 2012-2013

The Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA) invites applications for its graduate scholarship (MS and PhD) in agriculture and related fields (including biological sciences, social sciences, economics and statistics, forestry and fisheries, environmental sciences, agro-industrial technology and engineering, biochemistry, and development management) for school year 2012-2013. The scholarship is open to nationals of Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam who are regular employees of academic or research institutions or government agencies and not older than 35 years old.

Applications may be submitted directly to the Ministry of Education/Higher Education, or to the Ministry where the applicant is employed for preliminary screening. The Ministry where the applicant is employed may conduct preliminary screening of applicants and submit their nominations and the application documents to the Ministry of Education/Higher Education, which will then include the nominees of other Ministries in the final list of candidates accompanied by the complete set of requirements to SEARCA not later than 30 July 2011. Applicants should inquire with their respective Ministries regarding the Ministries' deadline for receiving SEARCA applications.

SEARCA scholars may study at any of the following members of the University Consortium coordinated by SEARCA: Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia; Kasetsart University, Thailand; Institut Pertanian Bogor and Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia; and University of the Philippines Los Baños, Philippines. Other reputable universities outside the University Consortium but within the Southeast Asian region may also serve as study posts of scholars under special arrangements and project agreements. Applicants may apply online via the SEARCA website, but original application documents must still be sent to their Ministry for official endorsement and submission to SEARCA. Applicants are required to submit to SEARCA applications for admission to the Graduate Schools of at least three universities in the list.

The application requirements and forms may study may be downloaded from the SEARCA website at <http://www.searca.org>.

The topic of the research that the applicants plan to conduct for their thesis must be in line with either of the priority thrusts of SEARCA, namely: natural resource management and agricultural competitiveness.

Interested parties may contact the Graduate Scholarship Department of SEARCA via email at gsd@agri.searca.org or ecc@agri.searca.org.

‘Disgusting’ sculpture in public exhibition

Milan city has extended the display of a controversial new sculpture by Italy’s famous artist, Maurizio Cattelan.

The sculpture of a hand raising the middle-finger, entitled ‘L.O.V.E.’ (more commonly known as ‘The Middle Finger’), is in full view at the Piazza d’Affari outside the Milan stock exchange. Strategically placed or not (in view of the proximity to the stock exchange), the artist denies any kind of irony or any anti-capitalist message.

Opinions on the art piece are greatly divided; some consider it an insult to Italian art, and some truly appreciate the Carrara marble sculpture.



Symbolic statue created by Cattelan stands in front of the stock exchange in Milan

The debate is now on whether to make the Piazza its permanent home or to move it to Milan’s new Museum of Modern Art.

Creating works that challenges and subverts the cultural and social mores and rules, Cattelan is one of Italy’s most well-known contemporary artists. He is self-taught, and his provocative art usually mixes sculpture and performance that expresses paradoxes and tests the limits of tolerance through irony and humour.

Source: BBC News

Returned Iraqi artefacts found in PM’s office

Over 600 missing antiquities have been discovered in cardboard boxes stored as kitchen equipment in the offices of Iraq’s Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

These artefacts are believed to have been a small part of what were looted and taken out of Iraq during the chaos of the US-led invasion. Many were moved back to Iraq but some were unfortunately misplaced upon return.

The 638 items found were jewellery, clay tablets, bronze figurines, and other items. They are all from different historical periods and cities; including those from the beginning of the Islamic era, the Sumerian, Babylonian and Hellenistic periods.

Despite international efforts to track other looted objects down, many have still not been located; tens of thousands dating back to thousands of years went missing during the war in Iraq.

Source: BBC News

‘Oldest’ images of Christ’s apostles revealed in Rome

Art restorers from a Vatican-funded restoration project have uncovered what are believed to be the oldest depictions of Jesus Christ’s apostles Andrew, Peter, and John.

Dating from the second half of the 4th Century or the early 5th Century, art historians reckon that these paintings may have influenced later images of Christ’s early followers.

Discovered in a tomb of a Roman noblewoman, archaeologists used a new technology through which calcium carbonate deposits, on the surface of paintings, that are formed by humidity and lack of oxygen, are removed by bursts of steam created by the interaction of laser and calcium carbonate.

Apostle Peter travelled in the Mediterranean area in the 1st Century, and wrote letters that are contained in the Bible’s New Testament. He was among Jesus’ first twelve disciples, along with Andrew and John. This discovery is perceived as an emotional revelation for the Christian faith.

Source: BBC News

Picasso art auction postponed

An auction of Picasso’s art works that had been given by Picasso to Maurice Bresnu, his driver, was called off after Parisian police confiscated 271 Pablo Picasso art pieces, and lodged a legal case against Mr. Le Guennec on ‘illegal possession’.

Le Guennec, a retired electrician who had installed security systems in Picasso’s homes in

France during the three years before the artist’s death in 1973, has turned out to be the cousin of the late wife of Maurice Bresnu, who is well known to art scholars as one of the main inheritors of Picasso’s works.

Le Guennec claimed that the 271 items were gifts, but the Picasso estate was not convinced as it would be very unusual for the artist to give that amount of his art works to a single individual.

Source: BBC News

US court awards firm for salvaging Titanic artefacts

The US federal judge has ruled that RMS Titanic Inc, a subsidiary of Premier Exhibitions Inc, is entitled to the full market value of the 5,500 artefacts salvaged from the Titanic ship wreckage site.

In 1994, a US court granted the company only the salvage rights to the vessel but not the ownership to the ruins or the objects.

On the 15th of August, 2011, however, US District Judge Rebecca Beach Smith will decide on the issue of ownership of the artefacts. The decision is between selling the objects through the court and transferring the proceeds to the company or to grant it full entitlement to the artefacts within terms and conditions.

Discovered in 1985 by an expedition led by Dr. Robert Ballard, the infamous Belfast-built ship sank on its maiden voyage in April 1912, four hundred miles off the coast of Newfoundland, Canada. The tragedy claimed more than 1500 lives.

The RMS Titanic Inc has undertaken over seven expeditions to the wreck site 2.5 miles below the north Atlantic.

The extensive effort in recovering these lost items has been highly praised by Judge Smith. Not only have the company helped conserved a cultural beauty but contributed to evolving marine archaeology equipment as well. They invented twenty specialised retrieval instruments for fragile items on the seabed, including a vacuum and a flat shovel.

The judge also recognised the danger divers face on these excavations. The sea floor pressure reaches 6,300 pounds per square inch, and damage to the hull would be instantly fatal for the divers. She said that RMS Titanic Inc has retrieved objects that would have been damaged or lost to future generations. The artefacts are being exhibited across the world.

Source: BBC News

New York museum repatriates King Tut objects to Egypt

A museum in New York will return to Egypt nineteen artefacts, which were retrieved from King Tutankhamun's tomb.

The items that include a tiny bronze dog and a sphinx bracelet jewel will do a final North American tour, on display at Times Square, New York City, then the Metropolitan Museum, among whose collections the objects were found, before finally returning to Egypt.

In 1922, a British archaeologist Howard Carter discovered King Tut's tomb in the Valley of the



Illustration by Zhou Binyao

Kings, where the famous site continued to be excavated for the decade following the sensational find.

An agreement was made at the time with Egyptian authorities that no objects from the tomb were to leave Egypt.

The artefacts to be returned are suspected to have had been illegally exported; they came into the museum's collection because Carter's house in Luxor, Egypt, was bequeathed to the museum.

The boy king reigned between 1336 and 1327 BC, and died suddenly as a result of what scientists believed was malaria.

Source: BBC News

Illustration by Sakulchat Chatrakul Na Ayutthaya except on this page