

Rampant looting of artefacts in Cambodia

Cambodian authorities are struggling to counter the illicit trafficking of artefacts, say Robert Carmichael in a *DPA* report.

He informed that a new booklet the 'Red List', produced by archaeologists, aims to guide police and border officials on what to look for.

Amidst widespread poverty in the country and poor law enforcement, the looting of ancient sites and temples is common and difficult to control.

A large number of monuments and sites is said to have been raided in the past few years by looters and traders hoping to exploit purchasers of Khmer statues and jewellery.

Ten years ago at Phum Snay, West Cambodia, road workers dug up a treasure trove of antiquities, Carmichael wrote, but no more than a year later, Phum Snay was robbed clean and destroyed, in terms of archaeological value.

The Red List describes artefacts that are most at risk of being stolen and trafficked.

It helps police, customs officers, border inspectors, tourists and those responsible for the protection of cultural heritage.

A previous list of a hundred stolen items had been made in 1993, resulting in the return of 10 of them which are now in the National Museum collection.

Determining the scale of the problems, however, is close to impossible as trafficking is an underground activity.

The illegal trade in archaeological objects is dictated by the prices placed on antiquities, particularly bronze and stone heads. Carmichael said that, four years ago, a Heritage Watch researcher analysed over 300 Khmer artefacts auctioned at Sotheby's in New York, and revealed that the prices offered ranged from US\$7,500 to \$30,000 each.

Egypt exhibition in Singapore

An exhibition in Singapore seeks to demonstrate ancient Egyptians' zest for life to counter the perception that they were obsessed with death.

'Quest for Immortality: The World of Ancient Egypt' displays about 230 artefacts chosen from the Egyptian and Near Eastern Collection of Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum.

Some of the exhibits are dated 4,000 BC, amongst them mummies, which include that of a young mother that was preserved together with the corpses of her two babies.

The show is sponsored by the government of Egypt, and its collection consists of artefacts discovered at Austrian archaeological excavations in Egypt.

Computer analysis identify fake art

Researchers of Dartmouth College in the US have revealed an easy way to determine imitations of original art works.

They demonstrated a method known as 'sparse coding' which constructs a virtual library of an artist's work, and reduces the visual elements to the simplest possible.

The approach reconstructs verifiable works of any particular artist by using varying proportions of those simple elements but would not be able to do so with fake works.

It is reported that the digital analysis of sparse coding can be applied to several issues relating to the study of art.

Authentication of art works is already a technical process that has wide appeal and application, as imitations and fakes continue to proliferate.

Oldest primate fossils uncovered

Thai archaeologists, in collaboration with French and Swiss specialists, have verified that fossils found in southern Thailand belong to a primate that lived approximately 35 million years ago.

This makes the primate fossils the oldest ever to be discovered, and also suggest that primates originated in Asia rather than Africa.

The find was made by the Mineral Resources Department 14 years ago in an abandoned coal mine in Krabi province.

The discovery included lower right molars and upper and left and right molars connected to the eye bone.

Anatomical Record, the scientific journal, published the confirmation of the age of the fossils in November 2009.

Neanderthals used 'make-up'

Researchers believe that Neanderthals used "body paint" and cosmetics 50,000 years ago.

Shells containing pigment residues that scientists claimed were Neanderthal make-up containers were found at two archaeological sites in Murcia, south of Spain.



Were Neanderthals consumers of cosmetic make-up?

The scientists say that the lumps of yellow pigment discovered were possibly applied as a foundation.

Red powder blended with flecks of a glossy black mineral was also found.

A report on the finding has been published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)*.

Tomb to shed light on Maya's downfall

A 1,100-year-old tomb has been excavated at the Mayan Tonina archaeological site in Mexico's Chiapas state.

Mexican archaeologists hope that the tomb may help to answer questions about the Maya civilization.

The tomb and objects from another culture may indicate the identity of occupants of the Maya site of Tonina before the fall of the Maya civilization

Prominence has been given to the theories of conflicts between Mayan states or environmental degradation as causes of the decline of Maya around AD 820.

A stone sarcophagus was found inside the tomb, along with a pottery and bones that archaeologists suspect belong to a woman.

Woman falls and damages Picasso painting



'The Actor' from Picasso's Rose period was painted in the winter of 1904-1905

A woman accidentally fell into a 105-year-old painting of Picasso, and damaged it while she was taking an art class at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

A vertical tear of some 15 cm was left in the lower right-hand base of the painting, 'The Actor'.

The museum announced that the "focal point of the composition" was not affected, and the

art piece would be repaired in time for an exhibition this year.

The exhibition, 'Picasso in the Metropolitan Museum of Art' will display about 250 works from the museum's collection.

Produced during Picasso's Rose period, 'The Actor' depicts an acrobat in an abstract background, painted on a 1.2 x 1.82 m canvas.

NYT News Service says that dealers rate paintings of this scale and period at over US\$100 million.

Conservators may also be inspecting the damaged canvas to see whether there is another painting underneath or on the reverse side of it.

Research recently shows that 'The Actor' was painted over the other side of a landscape work by another artist, whose old canvas Picasso used.

Love and lust exhibition is a success

An exhibition dedicated to Eros, the whimsical Greek god, opened in Athens, Greece early this year, and scored a stunning success within a month that prompted the Louvre museum to consider bringing the show to Paris, the city of love.

A seductive statue of Eros and Psyche locked in a passionate kiss, an ancient brothel, vases and urns depicting graphic sexual scenes of erotic

play and positions, and a marble phallus were past of the exhibition which tells the story of love and lust in antiquity.

The first major show on such a subject, it displayed 272 objects spanning a thousand years from 6 BC.

Organisers and researchers had prepared for 3 years before attracting 50 museums to collaborate with the museum of Cycladic Art in staging the stirring exhibition.

The show documented the evolving perceptions of Eros and the idea of love, and was structured in 9 sections, each related to a theme, i.e. the history of Eros, love in marriage and religion, and the status of women in ancient society, etc..

An inner sanctum hosted a reality-scale recreation of a Roman brothel, painted in ochre, which existed in Pompeii, Italy.

An outstanding revelation was the attitude that the ancient Greeks and Romans had towards prostitution, homosexuality and bestiality, suggesting an extremely tolerant society of openness and lack of guilt.

Giacometti sculpture record sale

A sculpture has become the most expensive item ever auctioned, at £65,001,250.

'L' Homme Qui Marche I', a life-size bronze sculpture of a man by Alberto Giacometti,

required only 8 minutes after which an anonymous phone bidder secured the record sale at Sotheby's, London.



Giacometti's sculpture had been set to sell for between £12 m and £18 m

Considered one of the most significant works of Giacometti, a 20th Century Swiss artist, the sculptures was believed to be worth so highly because there were few Giacometti sculptures, and they were rarely put up for auction

The auction of the sculpture eclipsed Pablo Picasso's 'Garçon a la Pipe' which in 2004 claimed the record for an art work sold – at £58,520,830 – in New York.

Another Picasso masterpiece, meanwhile, which had been unseen for 43 years, has fetched £8.1 m at Christie's earlier this year.

'Tete de Femme (Jacqueline)' is a 1963 portrait of the Spanish artist's second wife, whose neck was said to be short which Picasso often "humorously" exaggerated in portraits.

Museum show on "pre-archaeology"

An exhibition focused on the political implications of turn-of-the-century archaeology, during the treasure-seeking era before it became an academic discipline, is being held at the Ruhr Museum in Essen, western part of Germany.

Entitled 'The Great Game: Archaeology and Politics in the Colonial Period', the show assembled 800 artefacts, films and photographs, some of which never before seen in public.

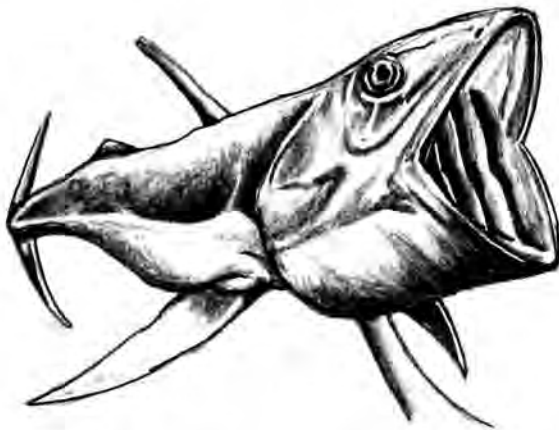
Archaeologists might also have been treasure hunters, explorers, defence attaches, missionaries, travellers and also spies during the colonialist era.

'Lawrence of Arabia' (T.E. Lawrence) supervised archaeological digs before he became part of British espionage in World War I.

Diplomat Max von Oppenheim, who led the Orient Intelligence Bureau in Berlin, directed a major excavation in Syria between 1911 and 1913

Giant fish existed in dinosaur era

New fossil evidence indicates that large population of giant fish existed in the seas of prehistoric times, and they became extinct at the same time as the dinosaurs.



Bonnerichthys, another giant fish, grew up to 5 metres in prehistoric times

Fossils examined shows that the plankton-eating fish lived between 66 and 172 million years ago.

The study by an international team started in Glasgow, Scotland, with an examination of the remains of leedsichthys, the giant Jurassic fish.

Many of the most significant new fossils were found in Kansas, U.S., and they all belong to the leedsichthys family.

DNA tests suggest Tutankhamun died from malaria

Based on a 2-year scrutiny of the mummified remains of 'Tutankhamun', the boy king of Egypt, experts say he may have died of malaria.

They extracted the DNA of the 19-year-old pharaoh, and found traces of the malaria parasite in his blood.

Since archaeologist Howard Carter's sensational discovery of the intact tomb of Tutankhamun in the Valley of the Kings in 1922, there has been much speculation and conspiracy theories – including hereditary disease, murder, foul play and a fatal fall from his chariot – on the mysterious causes of the young king's death.

Egyptian archaeologists confirmed that the pharaoh had indications of a form of Kohler disease II, an inherited disease afflicting the foot and curvature of the spine.

Among artefacts that were the king's possessions were staves that scientists believe could have been used as walking canes.

They also point to the significance of a fractured leg leading to a rare bone disease that Tutankhamun suffered shortly before his death.

The bone did not heal, and expose the weakened young pharaoh to infection, including a bout of malaria that might have killed him.

Egyptian researchers announced the DNA tests and results in February this year.

Reuters reported that the experts say the teenage king was born of an incestuous marriage, indicating the cause of his (club foot) limp, genetic defects and other deformities.

Incestuous wed-locks among Egyptian royalty were common practice, and the identity of Tutankhamun's mother would need many more months of investigation even though Akhenaten has been named by scientists as the father.

Akenaten's first wife was Nefertiti who did not bear him a son, compelling him to marry his sister so as to produce a male child.

Hindu temple excavated in Java

An intact 9th Century Hindu temple has recently been discovered on the grounds of the Islamic University of Indonesia in Yogyakarta.

The finding highlights Indonesia's varied religious history as interest brought Buddhist monks to the site near a mosque from which the muezzin calls the faithful to sunset prayer.

The country has the largest Muslim population in the world, where three major religious traditions, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, maintain their influences, particularly in Java.

According to Norimitsu Onishi in the *New York Times*, about 90 percent of Indonesians are

Muslim, with only pockets of Buddhists and Hindus left. "Hinduism and Buddhism, Java's dominant religions for a much longer period, permeate the society and contribute to Indonesia's traditionally moderate form of Islam." It is reported that the university will build a library in a half-circle around the Hindu temple.

Late last year, construction workers unearthed what could be the best preserved ancient monument ever found, experts say.

Yogyakarta's Archaeological Office assigned its staff to excavate the site for 35 days, and uncovered two 1,100-year-old small temples.

A statue of the elephant-headed deity, Ganesha, was found in pristine condition within the main temple.

Linggams, the symbol of worship in the form of a phallus, were also exhumed, along with altars, a statue of Nandi, the sacred bull that Hindu god Shiva rode on, and other artefacts.

Researchers believed that the monuments were buried in a volcanic eruption at Mount Merapi about a thousand years ago, which left them well preserved because the lava covered a river close by before flowing over the temples.

A researcher reported that the walls and statues of the monuments displayed fine relief, and the most valuable objects, including the Ganesha statues, have been moved to the archaeological office.

Iraq's antiquities may outshine Egypt's

The antiquities of ancient Egypt could someday be eclipsed by the glory of the buried antiquities of Ur, one of the cradles of civilization and biblical birthplace of Abraham, archaeologists and researchers believe.

War and the current strife in Iraq have held back the excavations in Ur, but experts say that treasures from the site will be comparable to those of Egypt, particularly since the tombs at Ur are over a thousand years older.

The most stunning discovery at Ur has been the ziggurat, a stepped platform, dating to the 3rd Century BC.

It was part of a Sumerian temple complex at a site which remains largely – 80% – unexcavated.

American archaeologist Charles Woolley sensationally uncovered 16 tombs in the early 1900s, finding some of the greatest treasures of antiquity, including the gold head-dress of a Sumerian Queen, an intricately-carved golden statue of a ram, a lyre decorated with a bull's head, and a golden dagger encrusted with lapis lazuli.

Fossil of snake-eating dinosaur found

A 67-million-year-old fossil is reported by researchers to belong to a snake that ate dinosaur eggs.

The 3.5m skeleton was discovered in a dinosaur nest, wrapped around a baby Titanosaur (adult Titanosaurs weighed up to 100 tonnes).

First unearthed in India in 1987, it was only in 2001 that scientists identified a snake among the dinosaur eggshells.

They think that the ancient snake was caught in a natural disaster such as a storm, and was preserved in time while it was attacking a hatchling from the egg.

Home of Jesus-era found

Archaeologists in Israel reported the finding of a dwelling in Nazareth that may date to the time of Jesus Christ.

The site offers glimpses of life during the period Jesus is believed to be growing up there, Israeli authorities said.

Remnants of a wall, a hideout, and a cistern for collecting rain water were discovered.

It is believed that a "simple Jewish family" lived in the small building containing two rooms and a courtyard.

The find was made when construction workers excavated the courtyard of a former convent that would be replaced by a new Christian centre.

Nefertiti stays in Berlin

Queen Nefertiti's ancient bust will remain in Berlin after German authorities refused to send it back to Egypt.

They explained that the antiquity is too fragile to be transported, and insisted that it was legally acquired about a hundred years ago by the Prussian state.

The 3,300-year-old limestone and plaster bust, which was found at Tell al-Amarna during an excavation financed by Germans in 1912, is the top attraction among the Egyptian collection at the Neues Museum in Berlin.

Queen Nefertiti was the wife of Pharaoh Akhenaton (who introduced a new religion that embraced worship of the sun), and is celebrated as one of the great beauties in ancient history.

Egypt has been requesting the return of the artefact since 1930, with claims that the object was smuggled out of Egypt in 1913, but has been refused by successive German governments.

Berlin says that Egypt has never officially confirmed its claim, even though the Egyptians have been campaigning for the return of antiquities.

In 2009, the Louvre Museum in Paris returned five ancient paintings from a 3,200-year-old tomb near Luxor.

The Egyptian artefacts are believed to be 3,500 years old.

More Egyptian artefacts and sites found

A giant red granite head of Amenhotep III, one of Egypt's most well-known kings, has been dug up in Luxor.

The 3,000-year-old head was unearthed in the ruins of the mortuary temple of Amenhotep II, grandfather of Tutankhamun.



*The head was part of a gigantic statue of Amenhotep III
Illustrated by Ariya Kongwong*

Researchers say that the 2.5m head is part of a colossal statue which was discovered many years ago, and that it will be reconstructed.

Archaeologists also found a 2,000-year-old temple in Alexandria that was dedicated to a cat goddess.

The discovery confirms the Greek dynasty of Egyptians persisted in the worship of animal gods.



Statue of Bastet, a domesticated cat which evolved from a lion-headed goddess

Excavated in the Kom el-Dekkah area of the city, the temple is said to belong to Queen Berenike II, wife of Ptolemy III who was king of Egypt in 3 BC.

Statues of Bastet, which the Pharaohs believed was a lion-headed goddess, were discovered.

In a departure from usual finding of tombs belonging to the royalty and elite, Egyptian archaeologists recently discovered tombs of labourers who constructed the great pyramids.

The discovery shows the way of life of the workers over 4,000 years ago.

It is believed that the thousands of men worked 3-month shifts, ate meat regularly, were paid labourers rather than slaves, and were buried in mud brick tombs in the shadow of the sacred pyramids they built.

The tombs date to the 4th Dynasty (2575 BC to 2467 BC), and yielded evidence that provides glimpses of typical ancient Egyptian society.

Swiss watches made with dino poo

A Swiss watch designer has created a timepiece, featuring fossilized dinosaur excrement, with the price tag of approximately US\$11,400.

Yuan Arpa, whose watch creations included the use of moon dust and rust from the Titanic, has now turned to coprolite, fossilized faeces or ancient animal droppings.



Watch designed with dinosaur fossils

Calling it “a unique work that contains a piece of history,” Arpa told *AFP* that the material originated from an herbivore, and investigations into the dinosaur species are underway.

He runs his label Artya, which is based in Vesenaz, Geneva, and described his approach as “very close to contemporary art,” and also the “dark side of watch-making.”

His colleague, Jean-Marie Schaller, also apply dinosaur parts in his watch-making, producing a limited edition that contained bone fragments from an herbivore of about 150 million years old which was found in North America.

Schaller said that the dinosaur-bone watch retails at about US\$295,470 and comes with a certificate authenticating the antiquity.

Natural causes led to Angkor's fall

Drought, rain and flooding over a sustained period of time contributed to the demise of Angkor in 1431, an international team of researchers concluded.

Studying the ring patterns of ancient trees, they discovered that the former capital of the Khmer empire was susceptible to natural events that threatened its water and food supply.

Angkor's predicament was compounded by its resultant vulnerability to infrastructural, economic and geopolitical pressures during the 14th- 15th centuries.

For decades, extremely dry periods in Angkor were met by sudden deluges and floods that damaged infrastructure, weakening an empire already in decline.

The scientists examined the rare cypress tree, *Fokienia Nodginsii*, at two sites in the highlands of Bidoup Nui Ba National Park, Vietnam, to reconstruct 759 years of monsoon and drought data.

Machu Picchu due to re-open

After closing for 2 months, Peru's most significant archaeological site, Machu Picchu, will be re-opened.

Landslides and heavy rain earlier this year forced the monument to be closed because rail access to the most popular site in Latin America was destroyed.

Ninety percent of Peru's tourism income is derived from the Cuzco region, where the 15th Century Inca ruins lost 60,000 visitors, and revenue estimated at US\$1m each day during the closure.

Over fifty percent of Cuzco's population is involved either directly or indirectly in the tourism industry, the local chamber says.

The closure of Peru's most visited site has demonstrated its profound importance to the country's economy.

Stolen Paul Klee work recovered

A stolen Paul Klee painting has been turned over to US authorities by a Montreal gallery owner who became suspicious after a Florida art dealer attempted to sell it to him.

The 1930 painting, 'Portrait in the Garden', depicts a woman surrounded by flowers, and had been stolen from the Marlborough Gallery.

US authorities have passed the art work to the London-based Art Loss Register, which

monitors stolen art, and operates a database listing 350,000 items.

The painting by the neo-impressionist Swiss artist, who was influenced by German Expressionists and Picasso's Cubism, is valued at US\$100,000.

Pompeii's victims on display

An extraordinary exhibition on the skeletal remains of victims of the catastrophic volcanic eruption in Pompeii is being held at the Antiquarium de Boscoreale, a short distance from Pompeii.

When Mount Vesuvius exploded, spewing forth a mass of volcanic debris on 24 August, AD79, two cities – Pompeii and Herculaneum – were completely destroyed.

Between 10,000 and 25,000 are estimated to have died.



Figure exhibit of a dog in a contorted position

Pompeii seemed to have been frozen as a vast amount of volcanic rock and dust swiftly consumed its inhabitants and livestock, killing many on the spot.

The exhibition focuses on these victims who have been preserved under a thin layer of plaster.

Digging up the bones, and maintaining them in plaster has been carried out since the 19th Century when archaeologists started to unearth Pompeii's buried existence.

The exhibits are displayed as archaeologists have found them buried in ash, including a victim clasping a step; a man with his arm over his mouth; and a family probably trying to "fend off the calamity that was engulfing them," *BBC News* says.

Over a hundred figures have been preserved in plaster, but not all are on show.

A total of 1,150 dead have been found in Pompeii; however, a third of the city is still not excavated.

Separate human species evolve

A team of scientists reported finding human's tools on Indonesia's Flores island which suggests that human-like creatures might have colonized the area long before a 'hobbit' human species existed there.

The scientists have dated the pre-'hobbit' humans to no less than a million years ago



*A variety of stone flakes were unearthed
Illustrated by Sakulchat Chatrakul Na Ayutthaya*

Tools discovered at the Mata Menge site, Sao Basin, central-west Flores, have been dated to 880,000 years ago.

Wolo Sege site yielded over 40 stone flakes, hand tools and other artefacts in deeper sediments which are even older.

Many of the recovered items had been buried, and capped by a layer of volcanic ash which has been dated precisely to over a million years ago.

The idea of Flores having a very long history of occupation will intensify the debate over the origins of the hobbit, *Homo floresiensis*, found on the island in 2003.

One theory holds that the hobbit, which evolved from the bigger *Homo erectus*, gradually became smaller in size and isolated.

Another has it that the features in the hobbit's body, e.g. its length and shape of shoulder girdle, are primitive and unlikely to belong to a dwarfed *H. erectus*.

These researchers propose that the hobbit may have evolved from older creatures who migrated from Africa to inhabit Asia even before *H. erectus*.



*Skull comparison: the hobbit (left) and modern human
Illustrated by Ariya Kongwong*

The discovery of *H. floresiensis* was astounding because it indicated that a separate human species with features not seen for millions of years existed at the same time as our ancestors some 18,000 years ago.

It challenges the long-held understanding of the evolution of humans, and raises questions about Africa's central role.

Critics from the line of argument that the hobbit, 1m-tall with a brain the size of a baby's, was a deformed human, explained that various genetic disorders might have caused its body and brain to shrink, and to develop odd features.

Ancient human relatives discovered

The fossils of two ancient human-like creatures have been uncovered in South Africa.

Found in cave deposits at Malapa in 2008, the remarkable remains of a female adult and a juvenile male are close to 2 million years old.

Scientists believe that the finds contain important information for the period between older hominids and the modern Homo species, while some researchers argue that they may belong to the Homo species.

The Malapa creatures were excavated from the well-known Cradle of Humankind world heritage site where large number of fine fossils have been found over the years.

In the same year, archaeologists found a fossil finger in Siberia (Altai Mountains, Denisova Cave) that analysis indicates belong to a previously unknown hominin.

Different from Neanderthals and early modern humans, this heavily muscled Homo species cohabited with Homo sapiens in the area about 30,000 to 50,000 years ago.

The study carried out by the Max Planck Institute suggests that early modern humans, Neanderthals and a completely distinct human-like creature had contacts in the region.

It has held for a long time that modern humans co-existed with Neanderthals in Europe for over 10,000 years, but the discovery of a dwarf human species, 'the hobbit' on the Flores island of Indonesia, introduces new considerations.

More evidences are emerging to challenge the conventional view of human evolutionary lineage, and many unknown hominin fossils may yet be found.

Illustration by Sakulchat Chatrakul Na Ayutthaya except those on pages 37 and 41