

The Asia and Pacific Museum in Warsaw: 1973-1998

THE ASIA AND PACIFIC MUSEUM IN WARSAW celebrates in 1998 the 25th anniversary of its foundation. A special exhibition, *Ex Oriente Lux/Light From the East*, of the best objects from our collection has been organised on this occasion at two of its galleries: Nusantara Gallery, and Asian Gallery

The first part of the exhibition commenced since April 1998 at the Nusantara Gallery, 18-A, Nowogrodzka Street, Warsaw. Part two of the exhibition will be opened in September 1998 at the Asian Gallery, 5, Freta Street, Warsaw.

The jubilee celebration programme include: *Jewel In Lotus* commemorative medal; *Orient In The Polish Cultures* symposium in October, 15 and 16, 1998; *Songs And Music Of The Asian Nations* gala concert in October, 1998; a *Asia and Pacific on Vistula* jubilee book publication; and lectures, film-shows, etc..

The Asia and Pacific Museum is the only Polish institution of this kind that promotes the cultural heritage of the nations of Asia, Australia and Oceania. Its aim is to spread mutual learning, co-operation and friendship between nations.

The Museum, which is state-owned, was founded in 1973 on the basis of a private collection of Oriental art, amassed and later donated to the Polish State by Mr. Andrzej Wawrzyniak, the Museum's founder and director for life and curator-in-chief.

Andrzej Wawrzyniak - sailor, diplomat and collector of Oriental art - came to Asia at the age 18 as an officer of the Polish diplomatic service, and spent nearly 27 years in Asia on postings in Vietnam, Indonesia, Laos, Nepal and Afghanistan, and visited other Asian countries. He is recognised at home and abroad as an authority in the field of Oriental studies, and was a member of the Oriental Studies Committee of the Polish Academy of Sciences, co-founder and President of the International Association of Friends of Khmer Culture, etc..

The Museum's collection in 1997 reached over 15,500 objects, most of which originate from Indonesia, Afghanistan, Laos, India, Nepal, Mongolia, Vietnam, and others from Asian countries such as

Bangladesh, Burma, China, Iran, Japan, Kazakhstan, Maldives, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand.

The Museum has till now arranged nearly 500 exhibitions in over 60 towns of Poland and abroad. It operates three galleries in Warsaw:

Asian Gallery, 5 Freta Street;

Nusantara Gakker, 18-A Nowogrodzka Street;

Dong Nam Oriental Art Gallery, 45 Marszalkowska Street.

Along with exhibitions, there are also organised lectures, film-shows, theatrical spectacles, concerts, lessons for Warsaw school students, celebrations of national days and special programmes i.e. 'Years of Culture' - Indonesia (1990), Mongolia (1991), China (1992), India (1993), the Pacific (1994), Vietnam (1995), etc..

In 1990, The Asia and Pacific Museum Yearbook '*Orient No. 1*' was issued, but has since, unfortunately, been suspended due to the lack of funds. Instead, the Museum published: 'Technology of Early Indonesian Keris' by Jerzy Piaskowski and Alan Maisey (1995), 'Joseph Conrad-Korzeniowski: His Indonesia, His Ships' by Mikolaj Henry Thierry (1996), and 'Asia' by Andrzej Strumillo (1997).

The Museum's Asian Library numbers over 12,000 books, periodicals, micro-films, video cassettes, records, slides etc.. It operates an informational network of books on Asian and Pacific countries with other public and private libraries.

The Museum co-operates with several hundred scholars and partner institutions - museums, universities, research institutes, non-governmental organisations etc., in more than 100 countries.

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Birds and dinosaurs: archaeological links

THE CONTROVERSIAL THEORY that dinosaurs did not become extinct but have evolved into birds has been boosted recently by what scientists described as the strongest evidence yet: two fossils of feathered dinosaurs - turkey-sized animals with strong legs, stubby arms and down-covered bodies - discovered in China.

Phil Currie, curator of the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Paleontology in Canada told *A.P.* that the fossils are thought to be of dinosaurs "capable of running swiftly, flapping feathered wings and fanning out impressive tail feathers but unable to actually fly."

The fossils are dated at 120 million to 136 million years ago, Mr. Currie said, adding that they are "absolute proof birds evolved from dinosaurs", and that dinosaurs are not extinct, but are represented by the 10,000 species of birds.

It would be a historic moment when the controversy, which has lasted for over 20 years, is finally resolved, he said.

"Fossils from the earliest known bird, called *Archaeopteryx*, have been dated at 140 million to 150 million years old. The new fossils closely resemble *Archaeopteryx* in some ways, but the new discoveries lack the precise form of true birds, particularly the length of wings and design of individual feathers. For this reason, the researchers believe the fossils represent true dinosaurs that are the immediate ancestors of the first birds, said the *AP* report.

In June, the international team of scientists, Mr. Currie, Mark Norell of the American Museum of Natural History, and Ji Qiang and Ji Shu-An of

the National Geological Museum of China, published their studies of the fossils in the journal *Nature*, and in a National Geographic cover story.

Ji Qiang and his Chinese colleagues recovered the two fossils from a dry lakebed formation in the Liaoning Province in northeast China where rich deposits of dinosaur remains have been found.

The discoveries, however, are not the final proof that birds evolved from dinosaurs, said Alan Feduccia, an evolutionary biologist at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He told *AP* that the new fossils are dated after those of the first bird, which indicates that the fossils may be either feathered dinosaurs or primitive birds that resembled dinosaurs.

Bread and DNA Ancient Greece

BAKING BREAD might have reached a superior state of art during the time of the ancient Greeks, long before it was previously estimated.

Patrick Quinn of Associated Press in Athens recently wrote an article concerning the conclusion of two British experts who studied "what people ate in the days before recorded history, and how their choice of food may have shaped the destiny of humanity".

Terry Brown and Glynis Jones found a way to extract traces of DNA from preserved wheat seeds (dating back to the earliest stages of agricul-

ture). They have recently completed their first report on their findings in discovering more of history that is preserved on a "molecular scrapbook rather than on stone or parchment".

The two researchers' report, *New Ways with Old Wheats*, suggests that Greeks (of Bronze Age) could have started baking bread of fine quality, as long ago as 3,300 BC. This estimation pegs it back to centuries before the kinds of wheat which produce bread existed.

Bread has an undeniably important role in civilisation and religion, and these questions about how agriculture develops, and propels the growth of ancient civilisations may also be answered by DNA examination.

Ms. Jones, an archaeobotanist at the University of Sheffield, studied 3,300-year-old charred wheat grains found in Assiros (a Bronze Age repository in northern Greece). She and Brown, a molecular biologist at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology, discovered that the wheat had "good breadmaking qualities, something not thought possible at the time".

To make bread wheat, cross-breeding is necessary. Prehistoric peoples ate wheat as meal or gruel, before the time when bread was made and consumed. The article also said the researchers' findings may change the time-line and location that historians assign to ancient farming methods and technology.

Furthermore, wheat which is believed to have been domesticated only once appears now to have been domesticated twice and in two separate places. Jones and Brown said that previously, wheat was thought to have been domesticated about 8,000 B.C. in the Fertile Crescent, an area that includes parts of today's Iraq, Iran and Jordan; but northern Greece seems now to have been engaged in its production as well.

Prehistoric Sailors

'*Homo erectus*' might have sailed from Java to the Indonesian Island of Flores 800,000 years ago

OUR EARLY ANCESTOR, *Homo erectus*, had not only learnt to stand upright and walk but also to sail, said archaeologists who claimed to have uncovered new evidence. *Homo erectus* (between 2 million to 200,000 years ago) is now believed to have built and sailed rafts out at sea 800,000 years ago.

In 1994, a team of Dutch and Indonesian archaeologists found ancient stone tools on Flores, an island in the Indonesian archipelago. They dated the artifacts back to about 750,000 years ago, a claim that was seriously challenged by the argument that fragments of human bones were not found. Their dating method, palaeomagnetic dating, which was used to determine the dates, was also questioned, due to its uncertainties.

In an April article written by Pearce Wright (*Syndicated Features*), experts Paul O'Sullivan and Asaf Raza, at La Trobe University, Australia, had re-examined the site, Mata Menge, and its objects, by a new method known as fission-track dating. It reports that the archaeologists who had explored the site are now convinced that prehistoric man came over to this site by raft or other sea-craft.

The fission-track dating technique, which determines the age of very old fossils, "depends on measuring tiny tracks that look like microscopic scratches, left in volcanic crystals like zircon by the spontaneous fission of uranium-238 atoms. The fission-track dating was applied to zircon grains obtained from ash layers just above and below the tool-bearing sandstone layer. The ages of the zircon grains were all between 800,000 to 880,000 years old."

The belief that *Homo erectus* (including the Java Man and Peking Man) was capable of sea travel have great implications concerning the evolution of human intelligence and navigational skills.

The article also remarked that "archaeology is a science bristling with sceptics", and the skepticism touched on the point that the volcanic islands in the area "are so unstable that there may even have been a land bridge briefly connecting them." Other skeptics offered the speculation that it might have had been a "primitive raft of tree limbs and vegetation" on which *Homo erectus* "accidentally drifted over to Flores."

Confiscation of smuggled Khmer artifacts

ANCIENT STONE ARTIFACTS were seized by Cambodian police in May when they were being transported in a truck heading for Thailand. The *Rasmei Kampuchea* newspaper reported the arrest of a smuggler, who was armed.

The newspaper said that carvings of *Apsaras*, the bare-breasted mythical dancers which are found on walls of Angkor monuments, statues of a lion's head, and 14 Buddha heads, made up the three-tonne confiscation.

It was reported that the artworks, believed to have had been looted from temples in the Preah Vihear province (bordering Thailand), were hidden between bricks in the

back of a truck which carried military licence plates.

Military high-ranked officers are alleged to be involved in the theft of antiquities - particularly at remote temples - usually by providing protection to looters for a cut of the profits, the paper said.

New species of dinosaur

FOSSILS FOUND ON AN ISLAND off the south coast of England belonged to an unknown dinosaur species, a British palaeontologist said in July.

Discovered in early 1997 by an amateur fossil collector, the evidence indicated that the creature was a cat-like, flesh-eating species with claws and razor-sharp teeth. This 3.6-metre dinosaur had unusually long hind legs, and is believed to be capable of running at high speed.

Steve Hutt, curator of the Isle of Wight Museum of Geology at Sandown, told AP the dinosaur had an appearance similar to that of a Velociraptor, and that it was a graceful but "very tough" animal. He said it had "very long, powerful hands with big claws, and very long back legs".

This new species also had a "very long tail, up to twice the length of its body", Mr. Hutt revealed, describing it as a "lithe, whippy thing that moved very fast as it hunted different kinds of prey".

He is also leading the excavation, describing the discovery as being "quite breath-taking", and was astounded by the length of the fibula and tibia (leg bones) as "something completely new". Excavation is continuing and will require a year or two to collect all the remains of the new specimen.