

World digital libraries

A website offering free access to manuscripts, maps, rare books, photographs and films worldwide will be launched this year.

Containing digitized content such as invaluable Chinese or Persian calligraphy and early Latin American photography, The World Digital Library is the third major digital library in the world, after Google Book Search and Europeana.

The website, drawing from global libraries and archives, will be launched by Unesco and 32 partner institutions, and available in 7 languages, namely English, Chinese, French, Spanish, Arabic, Russian and Portuguese.

Google has made available for full download books in the public domain, and will eventually provide users free access to 20% of copyrighted material.

Europeana is EU's rival digital library project to Google books, and has been receiving 40,000 online visitors each day.

Digitising the catacombs of Rome

A team of archaeologists, computer scientists and architects have begun work on Rome's catacombs in a 3-year project of comprehensive documentation.

They are using laser scanners to capture 3-dimensional images of the catacombs.

Dating to the 2nd Century AD, the underground Christian, Jewish and pagan burial sites stretch over 170 km, and there are more than 40 of them.

Wall paintings which have not been seen for over 2000 years will be visible.

The team has almost finished work on Saint Domitilla, the largest catacomb with tunnels, galleries, caves and burial chambers covering more than 15 km over many levels.

Flores's little people are a new species

Scientists have discovered more evidence that the "Hobbit" skeletons found in Indonesia belong to a new species of human.

Researchers have been debating the identity of these 1-metre tall humans who inhabited the Flores island about 8,000 years ago.

Papers published in the *Nature* journal endorse the proposition that they were a completely new human species.



The foot of the Flores human is considered primitive in several aspects

The group that unearthed the remains in Liang Bua cave contends that these tiny people belong to the *Homo floresiensis* species.

There have been many sceptical reactions to the speculations, and the arguments involved such diverse theories as evolution through a natural selection process called island dwarfing; and ideas such as the diminutive humans of Flores having grown more primitive over time; and even that they had branched off the human line at an earlier date than *Homo sapiens*.

Hohle Fels ‘Venus’ may be oldest

The world’s oldest depiction of a human figure may be a grotesque mammoth ivory sculpture.

Discovered in Germany’s Hohle Fels cave, the figurine, measuring 6cm in height, is believed to be about 35,000 years old.

The prehistoric carving portrays a woman in a distorted figure with large breasts, huge buttocks and disproportionate genitals.



The find may well be the oldest known figurative art

Known as the Venus of Hohle Fels, the artefact was found in six fragments and is missing its left arm and shoulder.

Scientists suspect that the Hohle Fels cave complex might have been ancient workshops for artists.

The enlarged breasts, buttocks and genitals which characterize later Venus objects are commonly interpreted to be expressions of fertility.

Stunning fossil, Ida, on display

A 47-million-year-old fossil of a creature resembling a lemur has been put on display in America.

Called Ida, the fossil is believed to be a “missing link” between modern primates, apes, monkeys, humans, and the more distant relatives.

Sceptics have been reacting negatively to the spectacle created in presenting Ida.

There have been criticisms that the sensationalism could damage the popularization of science if the find was not what it was made up to be.

The remains were unearthed in the 1980s from a fossil “treasure-trove”, near Darmstadt in Germany, known as the Messel Pit.

Private collectors had earlier split and sold the fossil in two halves, which were reassembled



The 47-million-year-old primate fossil was displayed at New York's Museum of Natural History

by a team led by Jorn Hurum, a fossil expert in Norway.

It is claimed that Ida existed during the Eocene, an epoch that was crucial for the development of early primates.

Imitation art in Vietnam

A popular discussion topic in Vietnam for some time now has been rampant art forgery.

Among local artists, it is common knowledge that the Vietnamese National Museum of Fine Arts in Hanoi displays art works that are copies of famous Vietnamese paintings

BBC Vietnamese Service reported that Nora Taylor, painting expert and art historian, believed 50% of the paintings exhibited at the museum were copies, the originals of which were either lost or sold.

Many authentic works were also stored away for safety during the war between North and South Vietnam, and have not been returned to the museum.

Officials are believed to have sold some of these originals which are now in private collection or galleries outside the country.



Many museums claim to own the original of 'Playing the O An Quan'

As an added aggravation to the situation, the market and demand for Vietnamese art have been contributing to the increase in the practice of copying, which analysts say has damaged the reputation of Vietnamese art in the international arena.

The *BBC* was told that prestigious museums worldwide were reluctant to borrow works from the Vietnamese National Museum of Fine Arts.

The local art community is now under increasing pressure to flush out the forged art from the original, as the Culture Ministry has announced the establishment of a panel to resolve the issue.

Row over 'Christ' sculpture in Italy

The Italian art world is rankled by a debate over the identity of the creator of a wooden sculpture.

Leading art experts in Italy are disagreeing with one another over whom it was who made the 40cm sculpture depicting Christ on the cross.



The controversial sculpture of Jesus Christ

An exhibition in Naples is displaying the work which features only the figure of Christ hanging on a sheet of transparent plastic, without the cross which had been lost in antiquity.

The authenticity of the piece has become a controversy, with skeptics criticizing those who claim that it was the work of Michelangelo.

Apart from the general consensus that it is a Renaissance piece of art from about 1495, arguments over whether Michelangelo, who

would have been 20 years old then, was the artist, and over whom might have produced it have been heated and acrimonious.

The lost city of Z and a legend

In a new book, 'The Lost City of Z' author David Grann recounts the adventures of explorer extraordinaire, Col Percy Harrison Fawcett, a British version of Indiana Jones.

The book is a biography, detective thriller and travelogue in narrating Fawcett's expeditions in the jungles of the Amazon.

It presents a by-gone age of exploration which included Fawcett's survival in the South American wilderness, incommunicado with the world outside it.

In 1925, Fawcett and Jack, his 21-year-old son, and Jack's best friend Raleigh Rimell, went on an exploration trip and never returned.

He was among the last of the individualist explorers who took on the challenges of the unknown before the advent of radio communication and air transportation.

The City of Z is a lost world in respect of which Grann believes Fawcett was convinced "that an ancient, highly cultured people still existed in the Brazilian Amazon and that their civilization was so old and sophisticated it would forever alter the Western view of the Americas"

Fawcett's adventures are believed to have inspired the novel, 'The Lost World' and the film, 'Indiana Jones and the Seven Veils'.

'Oldest pottery' discovered in China

Pottery specimens discovered in China may be the oldest ever found.

After examining the fraction of a type (isotope) of carbon in bone fragments and charcoal, they were determined to be 17,500 to 18,300 years old.

Published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, the report says that the dates are more accurate than previous tests because the estimate is supported by a series of over 40 radio carbon dated samples.

The specimens were found in a cave at Yuchanyan, Hunan province.

Pottery samples discovered in Japan are the previous oldest-known, dated to between 16,000 and 17,000 years ago.

Archaeologists, however, continue to argue over whether pottery was originally created in Japan or China.

New rock dating method

Scientists have been applying a novel technique in determining how continents were arranged 2.5 billion years ago.

The new method involves extracting rare minerals from rocks to analyse their composition.

For the first time, researchers can accurately date ancient volcanic rocks, and reconstruct early landmasses, by aligning rocks of similar orientation and age.

Geologists are now able to analyse rocks to establish how landmasses form when continents separated.

Minerals such as baddeleyite can be recovered with the new technique.

Baddeleyite contains much uranium, and scientists calculate the rate at which uranium naturally decays to lead, and measure the amounts of uranium and lead to obtain precise dates.

Fossil indicate dinosaur survival

Based on his work on fossils from the San Juan Basin (Colorado and New Mexico), emeritus scientist James Fassett has argued for years that some dinosaurs survived the catastrophic event that caused the mass extinction.

The fossils which he has been studying are believed to be bones of various species of dinosaur discovered together in a sandstone formation dating to the Palaeocene epoch that came after the Cretaceous-Tertiary extinction event.



Sketch of artist's conception of the catastrophic event at Yucatan

Other researchers have discounted such claims, with fossil evidence thus far turning out to be older than indicated.

Popular theory for the mass extinction has it that a devastating asteroid hit the Yucatan Peninsula, while other possible factors include climate change, disease, massive volcanism, etc..

First Neanderthal find in the sea

Researchers in Leiden, Netherlands, have presented in public a Neanderthal's skull fossil recovered from the North Sea, a renowned area for mammal fossils.

The fragment from the front of a skull belonging to a young adult male has been studied, with results matching other Neanderthal specimens, suggesting a carnivorous diet.



Portrait of a Neanderthal



A fragment of the skull

Discovery of ancient humans is rare, and finding a known specimen from the sea was a stunning event, despite the large number of fossilized remains of other animals hauled in by fishing trawlers and dredging operations from the North Sea every year.

Stable isotope analysis but not carbon dating was conducted on the 60,000-year-old fossil.

Scientists explained that to obtain adequate collagen, the protein for direct dating, about half of the specimen would have had to be destroyed.

Fossil snapshot of evolution

A new fossil specimen has been perceived as a snapshot of dinosaur evolution.

The find, dated to approximately 160 million years ago, indicates that the dinosaur's fingered hand consisted of the middle digits of the ancestral hand, with the outer two being dispensed with.

Excavated in China, the dinosaur fossil is contributing to a debate over the evolution of dinosaur hands to wing bones of modern birds.

The specimen, named *Limusaurus inextricabilis* (dinosaur which would not extricate itself from the mire), has a barely present first finger and the fifth finger is absent.

It is believed to have had been trapped in a mudpool during the Jurassic period.

The dinosaurs possessed beaks and possibly feathers



The new and exceptional dinosaur was unearthed in the Shishugou Formation in western China's Junggar Basin by a team led by China's prominent dino expert extraordinaire, Xu Xing.

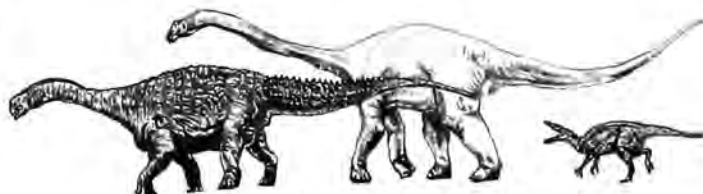
Australia yields new dino species

Fossils of three new dinosaur species have been discovered by archaeologists in Australia.

One of the creatures, 'Banjo' is described as a meat-eating beast that roamed the Outback some 100 million years ago, during the middle Cretaceous period.

The 500kg fearsome predator is believed to have been larger and more frightening than velociraptor (depicted in the Jurassic Park films), and the most complete carnivorous dinosaur ever found in the country.

Australia has now been hailed as a new frontier in vertebrate palaeontology, and an untapped resource in dinosaur history.



'Banjo' chasing two titanosaurs

The other two dinosaurs found with Banjo are new types of plant-eating, four-legged titanosaurs, the world's largest animals ever documented.

They were believed to have had been trapped in river mud, and that Banjo became stuck while attacking them, resulting in their bones being mingled upon discovery.

The oldest musical instrument found

Scientists believe that a flute dug up in Germany may be the world's oldest musical instrument.

The almost intact five-hole flute was unearthed in the Hohle Fels cave, Ach valley in southern Germany.

Meticulously carved with stone tools, the 35,000-year-old instrument was made from the hollow wing-bone of a giant vulture.



Oldest musical instrument dug up

The flute is about 20cm long and 2.2cm in diameter, and was found with other instruments, including fragments of three ivory flutes, indicating that playing music might have been common among stone age humans.

It is further suggested that creative and cultural expression is entrenched in human culture, and might have enabled modern humans to survive

by being more sociable and co-operative, taking into consideration the demise of the more culturally conservative and isolated Neanderthals.

Burma finds link to human evolution

Fossils found in Burma recently suggest that the evolution of shared ancestry of humans, apes and monkeys occurred in Asia and not Africa.

Researchers report that the pieces of 38-million-year-old jawbones and teeth belong to an extinct family of Asian anthropoid primates, a new species known as Amphipithecidae.

Unearthed in central Burma near Bagan, the fossils are dated older than any anthropoid discovered in Africa.

Despite the contention by the team that excavated and studied the fossils, the absence of a skull means that the distinctive anthropoid features of the eye and ear regions cannot be determined to help resolve the question of whether anthropoids originate in Africa or Asia.

The team expects to continue its search in Burma for more fossils to establish their proposition that the direction of anthropoid migration was from Asia to Africa rather than vice-versa.

Large fossil find in Thailand

Palaeontologists found a new species in the north of Thailand that may bridge a gap

between the ancient era dating back to the middle Miocene period and the modern world.

The findings were recently published in the *Journal of Human Evolution*.

A large number of fossils were dug up in Mae Mo, Lampang province, in 2004, including those belonging to a new primate species.

The primate fossils, named *Siamoadapis maemohensis*, is categorised in the class of strepsirrhines which include the modern lemur in Madagascar and the Southeast Asian lorises.

Palaeontologists believe that the middle Miocene strata in Thailand contain an abundance of fossils of diverse mammals.

The Mae Mo coal mine region is one of the largest lignite deposits with tertiary sediments 800m thick.

US forces damage Babylon

The American military invasion of Iraq has caused severe damage to the Babylon archaeological site, Unesco officials reported.

Babylon was used as an army base where heavy machinery were driven over historic parts, hilltops bulldozed, and trenches constructed in one of the greatest archaeological sites in the world, said experts.

They also claimed that it was not only the US military but looters who returned with a vengeance when control of the site was

transferred back to Iraq by the Americans 21 months after the invasion in 2003.

The US Armed Forces had also responded that looting would have been worse had its soldiers not been stationed there.

Unesco is striving to list the 4000-year-old city as a World Heritage site to protect the areas, and the US state Department is developing a World Monuments Fund programme to balance archaeology and tourism at Babylon.

Modern and ancient meet in Korea

A white shape-shifting tetra-hedron structure, called the Prada Transformer, constructed on a historic site in Seoul, was the unusual setting for a film festival.

Designed by the famous Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas, the installation could be transformed to serve various events, such as exhibitions, fashion shows and movie screenings.

The transformer was located on the sacred site of the 16th century Gyeonghui Palace, presenting a stunning contrast between ancient and modern.

In April, it hosted a fashion event, followed by a film festival which included rare classics in its programme of 14 films.

The screenings were open to the public, with no admission charges, attracting a large number of students.

Dutch returns artefacts to Iraq

The Netherlands government has handed back to Iraq 69 artefacts stolen from the country after the 2003 invasion by the US.

Dutch art dealers surrendered the ancient objects after the intervention of Interpol.



Thousands of artefacts looted from Iraq have been returned to the country

A more than 2000-year-old terracotta relief of a bearded man praying was among the returned loot.

In the chaos following the US invasion, tens of thousands of items are believed to have been stolen from Iraq, *BBC News* reports.

Less than half of them have been retrieved even though international efforts were made to find them.

Officials in the Netherlands hoped that the return of the looted art would set an example for other countries as well as send a signal to the international art market.

Machu Picchu a pilgrimage site

New findings suggest that Peru's Machu Picchu was not an Inca royal estate but a pilgrimage site.

Machu Picchu is an ancient site built by Inca ruler Pachacuti around AD 1460.

It is situated about 2,440m above sea level along a mountain ridge.

According to the study, it was constructed specifically as a pilgrimage site for pilgrims to trace the journey presumably undertaken by their ancestors.

Its southeast-northwest layout, for example, was conceived as the path of the sun across the sky, which took about a year in Inca.

Machu Picchu is now a famous tourist attraction although the original purpose for its existence continues to generate much debate.

Early toolmakers used heat technology

Researchers have found that early modern humans in South Africa applied 'heat treatment' to hone their stone tools some 72,000 years ago.

They say that this innovation, for which evidence was discovered at Pinnacle Point (a Middle Stone Age site on the South African coast), may link the use of fire to cook food 800,000 years ago and the production of ceramics 10,000 years ago.

Archaeologists experimented with heating the silcrete stones at Pinnacle Point, and realized that they could be used to improve the excavated stone tools, which were made of the same hard and resistant material.

They also found that at the same time that the tools were being produced by firing them, these early humans begun harvesting shellfish, creating pigments and grinding ochre.

Dvaravati art show: Paris to Bangkok

An exhibition that has achieved outstanding success at the Musee Guimet in Paris earlier this year is being held at the National Museum in Bangkok.



*Dvaravati dancing figure,
Terracotta, ca 9-10th century,
U Thong, Suphanburi*

The exhibition, 'Dvaravati Art: the Early Buddhist Art of Thailand', offers 149 pieces of Dvaravati artefacts from the National Museum Bangkok and other national museums in the country.

Dvaravati art, with its source in India, were created in the Chao Phraya basin of Thailand during an early period of civilization between the 6th and 11th centuries.

The Dvaravati influence was widespread throughout Thailand, covering the north, northeast and south.

Bone indicates cannibalism

Torquay museum staff has identified a human bone with tool cuts as possible evidence of cannibalism.

The arm bone bears marks thought to be have been caused by stone tools, and suggests the conduct of a ritual 9,000 years ago, or that humans had been devoured.

Archaeologist William Pengelly discovered the bone in Kents cavern, Torquay, in 1866.

It was "rediscovered" in 2008 from the museum storage, and examined by a team of researchers from the museum and the University of Oxford's School of Archaeology.

They believe that such finds reflect the complexity of funerary behaviour in the Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age) before the practice of farming – more associated with complex mortuary practices – several thousands of years later.

Discovery of Scotland's 'earliest' face

A carving discovered on the Orkney island of Westray may be Scotland's earliest human face. Dated to 5,000 years old, the small figurine has been described as a find of "astonishing rarity."



Neolithic carving of a human with face

Archaeologists unearthed the sandstone artefact at the Links of Noltland, the only Neolithic carving of a human form to have been found in Scotland.

The object is flat, measuring 3.5cm by 3cm, and features a round head, with a face bearing heavy brows, two dots for eyes and the nose represented by an oblong.

BBC News quoted Culture Minister Mite Russell as saying that the discovery is of "tremendous importance – representations of people from this period are incredibly unusual in Britain."

Boy appointed museum's director

The National Railway Museum in York, England, has appointed a 6-year-old boy as its "Director of Fun."

Youngster Sam Pointon from Leicester, who loves trains, wrote to the museum to apply as a replacement for the outgoing and retiring director.

Sam's family was on vacation when his father came upon a newspaper advertisement, and teased Sam about it being his dream job.

On return from the holiday, Sam wrote a letter, and they decided to post it.

They received an invitation to visit the museum, and Sam was offered the job.

Sam's parents had to tell him that he still has to go to school despite landing his dream job.

Classic art in multi-media

Digital representation of art works such as the Mona Lisa is the new sensation in a Beijing exhibition.

Leonardo da Vinci's 16th century portrait of Mona Lisa speaks fluent Chinese, answers questions, and chats about her life.

In the Last Supper, Jesus Christ walks around the table and talks with his disciples.

The World Classic Interactive Arts Exhibition in China offers classic paintings and life-sized

Roman and Greek divinities in multi-media, 3-D, holograph, and with voice recognition technologies.

Khmer dance project

The Center for Khmer Studies is collaborating with the Dance Division of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts in documenting the history and practice of Khmer classical dance.

With the ambition of making information and the comprehensive archive on the Khmer royal dance available to the public, a database will be created and will include letters, costumes, music, etc..

There has not been a systematic inventory of the Khmer classical dance tradition, despite its worldwide fame, and this project is thus timely as old masters and vast reservoirs of knowledge are vanishing.

For generations, the culture of dance in Cambodia was transmitted orally from master to pupil, but its history suffers numerous disruptions.

The Khmer Rouge regime (1975-1979) banned the classical dance, and many artists were prosecuted, with few surviving after 1979.

Unique Asean-Korea musical collaboration

Seventy musicians and composers from 10 Asean countries and Korea have formed the

Asean-Korea Traditional Music Orchestra to promote friendship and understanding through cultural exchanges.

Initiated by Korea's Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the orchestra will perform in concerts to promote Asian music around the world.

Workshops, rehearsals and a trial performance were held earlier in the year.

After a year-long period of preparation, the orchestra premiered at the Jeju International Convention Centre on May 31 in front of Korean President Lee Myung-bak and 10 visiting heads of state from Asean countries.

The 1,500-person capacity theatre was filled and treated to a performance that produced harmony and new possibilities of musical collaboration amongst countries.

Music of each country was presented by the uniquely-composed orchestra that included 52 types of 79 traditional instruments from the various participating nations.

Giant ancient elephant dug up in Indonesia

An ancient elephant has been unearthed in Java where villagers of Blora, a small town some 100 km from Semarang, made the rare discovery of what the *Jakarta Globe* described as "the most intact fossilized elephant skeleton ever found in Indonesia."

The 4-metre-tall, 5-metre-long, 10-tonne giant elephant was estimated to have died 200,000 years ago, and is an extinct species which existed during the period when modern humans evolved in Africa, according to the *Daily Telegraph*.

University of Wollongong researchers took a month to delicately excavate the prehistoric

fossil, and they are the same team that found the Flores human in 2003 known now as the Indonesian Hobbit.

The skeleton of the elephant that had been trapped in quicksand, became visible after recent rain in a sand quarry, next to the Solo River, which had been abandoned since part of the quarry collapsed.