

CyberScribe 186 – February 2011

As the CyberScribe is writing this, he is sadly watching the chaos and troubles in Egypt. Because events are unfolding so rapidly, the CyberScribe has decided to not discuss the revolutionary events in Egypt. He fears that anything he says may be shown false by later events, and he does not want to be responsible for spreading rumors. By next month the situation will hopefully have stabilized and there will be much to report.

The Arab news source, Al Jazeera, must be given great credit for their wonderful coverage and insightful reporting they are conducting. Located in Doha, Qatar, they have proven to be the voice of reason and calm in all this uproar and morass of rumor.

The CyberScribe shakes his head and wishes that Egypt could quickly find calm, reason and a new government that represents them in the best possible way.

The most important event to us who watch ancient Egypt has been the appointment of Zahi Hawass to a ministerial post in the new government announced by Hosni Mubarak. In response to the protests and rioting, the old cabinet was dismissed and a new one formed. This is probably very good news for the antiquities, as he has shown great zeal in protecting, enhancing and expanding the control and maintenance of Egypt's heritage. That job is very important right now as looters damage sites, steal artifacts, and savage so many sites in Egypt. Even the august Egyptian Museum has been violated. The CyberScribe wishes him all the best in the great task.

One of the published announcements on this new promotion appeared in 'Heritage Kew' (<http://snipurl.com/1yayfi>) and is presented here:



‘Dr. Zahi Hawass, has been promoted in the shake up of Egyptian President's Hosni Mubarak's new cabinet according to a report from AP. Formerly the Vice Minister for Culture, and the Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), Dr. Hawass will now take the role as Minister of a newly created department - the State Ministry for Antiquities. Literary critic Dr. Gaber Asfour has been named the new Minister of Culture, replacing the long-serving Farouk Hosni.

‘The cabinet shake up comes in the wake of political turmoil across Egypt, which saw a lack of police protection for key sites such as Cairo's Egyptian Museum. Looting at the museum saw damage caused to several artifacts including those discovered in the famous Tomb of King Tutankhamun, as well as reports of severe looting at sites including Saqqara, Memphis Museum and Abusir. Former director of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, Wafaa el-Saddik, also revealed that museums in Egypt do not have insurance.

‘Last year, Dr. Hawass was installed by President Mubarak as the Vice Minister for Culture in a move to allow him to postpone his pending mandatory retirement as the Secretary General of the SCA, as Egyptian ministers do not have a set age for retirement.’

One of the great objects in the Egyptian Museum, and is prominently obvious as one walks into the great central hall of the museum. This is the enormous pair statue of Amenhotep II and his Queen Tiye. What you might not have noticed is that the huge statue is made up of many pieces and is largely incomplete. News from a short while back is that a number of additional fragments of the great statue pair have been found. While they will not add greatly to the existing statues, they are important. The story was best told by 'Discovery' (<http://snipurl.com/1yb0b5>). Presented here (abbreviated) it states:

'Egyptian archaeologists have unearthed six missing pieces from a 3,400-year-old colossal double statue of King Tut's grandparents, the Supreme Council of Antiquities announced Sunday. Belonging to the statues of King Amenhotep III and his wife Queen Tiye, the fragments were found at the pharaoh's mortuary temple in Luxor during work to lower the ground water on the west bank of the Nile.



The colossal double statue of King Amenhotep III and his wife Queen Tiye on display at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (courtesy of Vipeldo/FlickrreviewR/Creative Commons)

‘Currently a centerpiece of the main hall at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, the double statue was unearthed in 1889 at Medinet Habu on the west bank of the Nile by French Egyptologist Auguste Mariette.

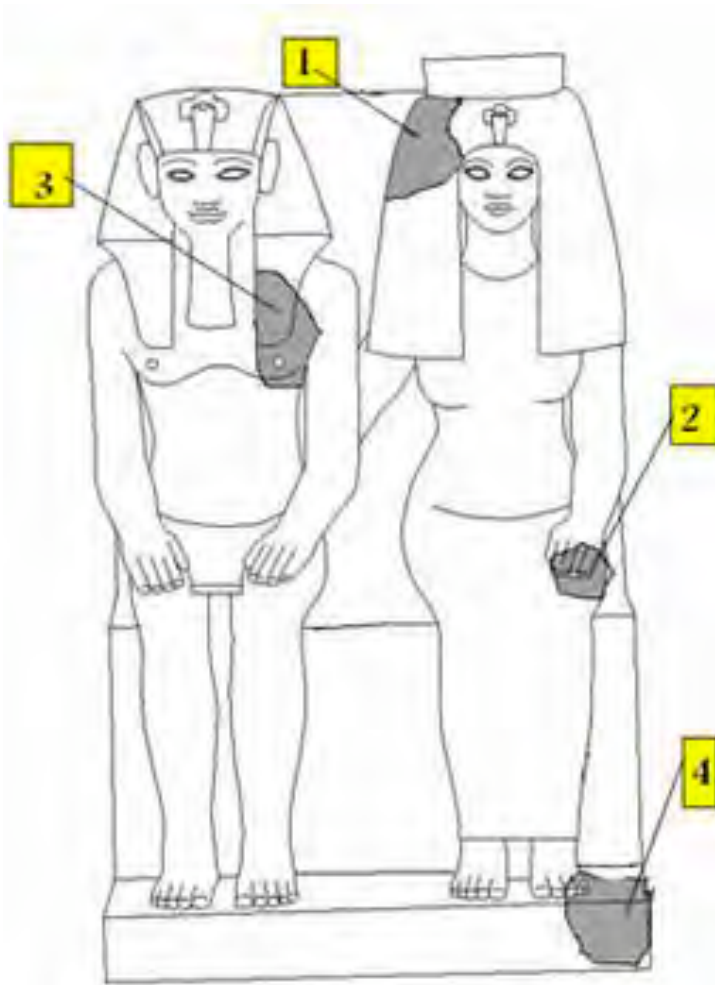
“When the statue was first discovered an Italian team restored it and filled in the missing pieces with modern stonework,” Dr. Zahi Hawass, Secretary General of Egypt’s Supreme Council of Antiquities, said in a statement.

‘Ranging from 47 cm (18.50 inches) to 103 cm (40.55 inches), the uncovered fragments belong to the right side of Amenhotep III's chest, crown and leg. The other pieces come from a section of Queen Tiye’s wig and from her left arm, fingers and foot.

‘Amenhotep III’s funerary temple was the largest in ancient Egypt and was guarded by two (still standing) gigantic statues of the Pharaoh, known as the Colossi of Memnon. Unfortunately, the temple was demolished during the Late Period, and its blocks were reused in the construction of other buildings.

‘The recovered fragments are now being stored in the west bank magazines for documentation and restoration.’

More detail can be seen here:



‘The pieces recovered come from Amenhotep III's chest, nemes headdress and leg, and Queen Tiye's wig, left arm, fingers and foot. A small section of the base of the double statue was also found.’

Those of us here in North Texas recently had the great pleasure of welcoming Barry Kemp here to give a lecture and conduct a seminar for our Chapter. After he left, he received a very great honor. The story is best related here (abbreviated) in an announcement from Oxford University (<http://snipurl.com/1yb2fu>).

‘The Queen's New Year's Honours. List was announced on the eve of this month, and Oxbridge academics, along with senior members from both universities, were very well represented.’

‘Among those recognized by Her Royal Highness was Professor Barry Kemp, Fellow of Wolfson College, Cambridge, a senior research fellow at the

McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research. Professor Kemp was awarded a CBE for his services to archaeology, education, and international relations.

‘Three members of Oxford university were likewise recognized with CBE's: Professor H. Charles Godfray, Hope Professor of Entomology and Fellow of Jesus College, for services to science in the field of experimental population biology; Mark Damazer, Master of St Peter's College and one time head of BBC Radio 4, for his contribution to broadcasting; and Dr. Christopher Brown, Fellow of Worcester College and Director of the newly refurbished Ashmolean Museum, for his role in revitalizing British museums.

‘In total, six members of Oxford were honored (2 knighthoods, 1 OBE, and 3 CBE's) and six members from Cambridge (1 knighthood, 2 OBE's, 1 CBE, 1 DBE, and 1 MBE).

‘The Queen bestows her honors twice every year, in a Birthday list and a New Year list. The order of chivalry with which recipients are awarded was established by George V in 1917. The hierarchy of honors is as follows:

- * Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the British Empire (GBE) or Dame Grand Cross of the Order of the British Empire (GBE)
- * Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire (KBE) or Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire (DBE)
- * Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE)
- * Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE)
- * Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE)'

The CyberScribe found a picture of the insignia Barry Kemp is now allowed to wear. Unfortunately, he is not yet ‘Sir Barry’. That must wait awhile.



While the CyberScribe sometimes finds his thoughts about Egyptology at odds with those of Zahi Hawass, but in this next bit Hawass is right on top of something the CyberScribe has also worried about. In his own website, Hawass has stated (<http://alturl.com/mq7k2>) that the obelisk in New York's Central Park is at risk. Although long denied, there is serious frost damage to the obelisk. He has told New York to shape up or he'll repossess the obelisk...something that he cannot do, of course, as it was a gift to the city from Egypt. There are things that can be done, of course, and Hawass is right in his general demand...protect the monument! Although stated in an inflammatory mode, as he so often does, Hawass stated (abbreviated) that:

'Since 1880 a beautiful obelisk commemorating King Thutmose III has stood in Central Park in New York City. This obelisk is one of a pair - the other one currently stands in Westminster in London.



The Central Park obelisk of Thutmose III.
(Photo: Richard Paschael and Dorothy McCarthy)

‘It has recently been brought to my attention that this incredibly valuable monument has been severely weathered over the past century and that no efforts have been made to conserve it. Because one of the main focuses of my tenure as Secretary General has been the conservation and protection of Egyptian antiquities, I feel it necessary that I fight for the restoration of this obelisk. Today I sent a letter to the president of the Central Park Conservancy and the Mayor of New York City asking for their assistance in caring for this artifact.

‘I would like to share it with all of you:

“I write to you as someone who shares a mutual interest in conserving precious historical treasures for future generations. I applaud the efforts of the City of New York and the Central Park Conservancy in restoring this beautiful space, but I would like to draw your attention to a monument that I, and many others, believe have been overlooked in the park.

‘I am sure you are well aware of the obelisk of Thutmose III, referred to as “Cleopatra’s Needle,” that has resided in Central Park since 1880. I am glad that this monument has become such an integral part of New York City, but I am dismayed at the lack of care and attention that it has been given. Recent photographs that I have received show the severe damage that has been done to the obelisk, particularly to the hieroglyphic text, which in places has been completely worn away. I have a duty to protect all Egyptian monuments whether they are inside or outside of Egypt. If the Central Park Conservancy and the City of New York cannot properly care for this obelisk, I will take the necessary steps to bring this precious artifact home and save it from ruin.’



Close-up of text on the obelisk, which has been severely eroded from exposure to the elements. (Photo: Richard Paschal and Dorothy McCarthy)

Another major stabilization and restoration project started by Hawass will now, most certainly, be postponed, and this may be a tragedy. Hawass has hired a Welsh firm to do some radical attempts to shore up and stabilize the Step Pyramid at Saqqara.

The pyramid is very seriously hollowed out inside, the result of ancient quarrying, and it could collapse at any moment. This would be a great tragedy, but now the stabilization project may be on indefinite hold, given the problems in Egypt.

The statement in the 'South Wales Argus' (<http://snipurl.com/1yba7s>) describing the project states:

'Cintec, based at Goldtops, was called upon by the High Council of Egyptian Antiquities to preserve the pyramid of Djoser - otherwise known as the Step Pyramid - which was built in the 27th century BC for the burial of Pharaoh Djoser by the architect Imhotep.

'The historic structure was severely damaged by an earthquake in 1992, adding to previous faults, and led to the partial collapse of the burial chamber ceiling, which if left untreated could see the central chamber collapse.

'The company will use a combination of technologies, including one called Waterwall, which will use water and air-filled bags to support the ceiling while they carry out repair work. This will allow them to repair and protect the Step Pyramid from further damage without altering its outer appearance.

'Engineers will also use stainless steel anchors, which are surrounded with a special fabric sock and inserted into the body of the structure. The anchor is then inflated with a micro grout applied using a combination of pressure and vacuum to secure it.

'Peter James, managing director of Cintec said the firm was extremely pleased to have been appointed to the project. "The Step Pyramid project is of particular importance to us as the entire structure could be destroyed at any point due to the damage on the ceiling and roof caused by the earthquake. We aim to work as efficiently as possible on this project without comprising the design or strength of the structure.'"

The CyberScribe has reported several times about the work done in Egypt on the DNA of some royal mummies. The Egyptians and their co-researchers gave a very well defined and confident analysis of the royal mummies and their relationships.

Not everyone has agreed with these results and there have been a number of calls for better and more extensive work to confirm the original announcements. One of the best articles on the side of the doubters

appears below (abbreviated in the 'New Scientist'
(<http://snipurl.com/1ybc3>):



'Can we be sure which mummy was the daddy? When a state-of-the-art DNA analysis of Tutankhamun and other ancient Egyptian royals was published last year, its authors hailed it as "the final word" on the pharaoh's family tree. But others are now voicing doubts.

'The analysis of 11 royal mummies dating from around 1300 BC was carried out by an Egyptian team led by Egypt's chief archaeologist Zahi Hawass. The project was overseen by two foreign consultants, Albert Zink of the EURAC Institute for Mummies and the Iceman in Bolzano, Italy, and Carsten Pusch of the University of Tübingen, Germany.

'The researchers used the DNA data to construct a family tree of Tutankhamun and his immediate relatives. The study, published last February in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (vol 303, p 638), concluded that Tutankhamun's father was the pharaoh Akhenaten, that his parents were brother and sister, and that two mummified fetuses found in Tutankhamun's tomb were probably his stillborn daughters – conclusions that have since become received wisdom.

'But many geneticists complain that the team used inappropriate analysis techniques. Far from being definitive, the study is "not seen as rigorous or convincing", says Eline Lorenzen of the Center for GeoGenetics at the Natural

History Museum in Copenhagen, Denmark. "Many of us in the DNA community are surprised that this has been published."

'Ian Barnes, a molecular palaeobiologist at Royal Holloway, University of London, is also concerned. "In my experience it is not very easy to get these results," he says. "I can't do it, and I've spent a long time trying."

'Zink and his colleagues used a genetic fingerprinting approach that involves testing variable regions of the genome called microsatellites, which are made up of short sequence repeats. The numbers of repeats vary between individuals, and by comparing the number of repeats across several microsatellites it is possible to work out whether or not individuals are related.

'However, researchers rarely attempt this approach with ancient samples because the original DNA is likely to be degraded, and dwarfed by modern contamination. It's more common to sequence mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) – cells contain around a thousand times more copies of mtDNA than of genomic DNA, improving chances of finding large intact samples.

'Zink and Pusch defend their choice, saying that they took extensive precautions to guard against contamination. For instance, they extracted samples from deep inside the mummies' bones, and genotyped lab staff to rule out contamination.

'But others doubt the precautions were sufficiently rigorous. Robert Connolly of the University of Liverpool, UK, who carried out blood typing of Tutankhamun's mummy in the 1960s, argues that it would be difficult to reach deep enough inside Tutankhamun's thin, fragile bones – or those of the two fetuses – to reach uncontaminated material.

'To judge the quality of the team's results, Lorenzen and others are asking for access to raw data not included in the Journal of the American Medical Association paper – but Zink is reluctant to oblige, fearing the data would spark "a lot of arguing" over technicalities.

'However, Zink, Pusch and colleagues insist that they will soon be able to put any doubts to rest. They say they have also extracted the mtDNA that Lorenzen and others consider necessary for rigorous genetic analysis and are still working on the data. They hope to publish the results this year.

'But the critics are still advising caution. "When working with samples that are so well-known, it is important to convince readers that you have the right data," says Lorenzen. "I am not convinced."

Another of the friends of our Chapter, and a Member of the Chapter is Gayle Gibson at the Royal Ontario Museum. She recently was showcased with some of her work on the museum's mummies. The article (abbreviated) was published by the 'Star' news (<http://snipurl.com/1ybelw>):



ROM teacher and Egyptologist Gayle Gibson looks at two mummified babies that are part of the ROM collection. Although the 2000 year old mummies were once on display, they are no longer viewable to the general public and in the museum's storage.

'Gayle Gibson, a teacher and Egyptologist at the ROM, takes us behind the scenes and reveals fascinating details of two little mummies in their collection. The mummies have not been on display to the public for decades and will likely remain in storage. Video by Chris So / The Toronto Star (Jan 20, 2011)

Amy Dempsey Staff Reporter

‘Somewhere deep in the organized jungle of museum storage, Gayle Gibson leans against a long stretch of counter, cooing and fussing over a baby named Hor.

“‘Poor little fella,” says Gibson, an Egyptologist and teacher at the Royal Ontario Museum. She smiles parentally at the 2,000-year-old mummified infant resting in front of her. “He’s a nice little kid.”

‘Details on his life are sketchy, but Gibson can say that he was born in ancient Egypt, probably came from a rich family and died shortly before his first birthday. Recently, he has spent a lot of his time lounging in the stuffy ROM storage room, covered in – and resting upon – various layers of protective materials.

‘Next to him rests his longtime companion, Sheri, another mummified Egyptian infant who researchers know even less about because she – or he – is hidden under a hand-painted linen wrap. Hor’s maleness was confirmed during a recent CT scan, but Sheri’s covering makes it more difficult to assess her sex.

‘After spending decades in boxes, the mysterious mummy babies have been pulled out of hiding for their television debut. Along with a few other ROM curiosities, Hor and Sheri are featured in an episode of the new series Museum Secrets, set to air on History Television Thursday night.

‘Researchers don’t even know how they got to Toronto in the first place. Gibson says they likely came to North America with a tourist or a researcher. Travellers in the late 1800s routinely brought mummies back from Egypt as souvenirs and scientists sometimes took them home as objects for study.

‘Gibson first encountered the pair of infants in the 1950s when she visited the ROM with her Brownie troops, but she hasn’t seen them on the museum floor since. “I doubt these mummies will go back on display in my lifetime,” she says.

‘Mummification may seem gruesome but Gibson says at heart, it’s a loving gesture. The babies’ parents likely wanted to ease their passage into the next life, so they would meet again. Gibson hopes that one day, as DNA expertise advances, scientists will be able learn more about the mummified babies with non-invasive technologies.

“I’d love to know their names,” Gibson says. “The Egyptians had a saying: ‘To speak the name of the dead is to make them live again.’ I’d like to be able to speak their names.”

A rather odd suggestion has been aired concerning a rare depiction of an elephant in an ancient Egyptian tomb decoration. This picture has been known for many years, but the new look suggests that the little elephant is very much different from the usual interpretation. The report suggests that it might have been a now extinct pygmy elephant sent as a gift to the Pharaoh.

This idea was discussed and defended in an article from ‘ScienceBlogs’ (<http://snipurl.com/1ybgzx>), and is presented here (abbreviated):

‘You’re likely already familiar with this (now well known) case: here’s the image, as it appears on the beautifully decorated tomb wall of Rekhmire, ‘Governor of the Town’ of Thebes, and vizier of Egypt during the reigns of Tuthmose III and Amenhotep II (c. 1479 to 1401 BCE) during the XVIII dynasty.

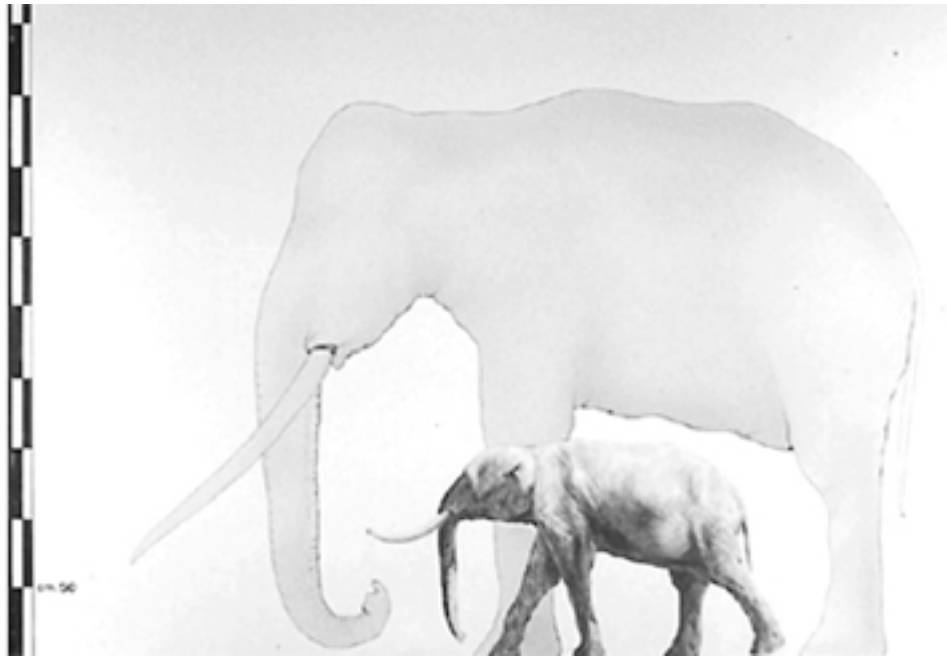


'In 1994, Baruch Rosen published a brief article in *Nature* in which he drew attention to the small, tusked, hairy elephant in the painting, shown as being waist-high to the accompanying people. The people next to the elephant seem to be Syrian traders, carrying objects that include tusks. African elephants *Loxodonta* and the now extinct Middle Eastern population of the Asian elephant *Elephas maximus* were both known to the ancient Egyptians, but Rekhmire's elephant doesn't seem to be either

'Its apparent hairiness, convex back and domed head make it look like a juvenile Asian elephant, but then why it is shown with huge tusks? It seems to have a fairly large ear, though whether this ear is shaped more like that of *Loxodonta* or *Elephas* is difficult to say.



'Inspired by the then-new discovery that a dwarfed population* of Woolly mammoths *Mammuthus primigenius* were still living as recently as 3700 years ago (albeit on Wrangel Island in the Siberian Arctic: Vartanyan et al. (1993), Guthrie (2004)), Rosen (1994) made the tentative suggestion that the elephant shown in Rekhmire's tomb might actually be a dwarf Woolly mammoth. If true, this would have radical implications. It would mean that the ancient Egyptians had a trading link of sorts with far eastern Siberia, and also that mammoths were captured and then transported alive to Africa!



‘There is a possibility that Rekhmire's elephant is neither a Siberian mammoth nor a wrongly-scaled 'symbolic' elephant, but perhaps a depiction of one of the pygmy Mediterranean island-dwelling species. Most of the dwarf Mediterranean elephants were Pleistocene animals that were long gone by the time of the Pharaohs, but Masseti (2001) noted that a population of dwarfed elephants seem to have lingered on in isolation on the Greek island of Tilos (located between Rhodes and Kos). The Tilos elephants are *Elephas tiliensis* Theodorou et al., 2007, but have often been compared to *E. falconeri* of Malta and Sicily.

‘Radiocarbon dating of the Tilos dwarf elephants apparently puts some of them as recent as about 4300 years old (+/- 600 years), meaning that they overlapped with the presence of Bronze Age people on the island (Masseti 2001). The remote possibility exists, therefore, that Tilos elephants were captured by ancient Aegeans and then traded between Aegeans, Near Eastern people, and Egyptians - in fact, known trade did occur between these regions during the late Bronze Age at least.

‘And there's also the possibility that the animal depicts an individual from another late-surviving dwarf population that we don't know about. Some of the extinct Mediterranean dwarf elephants are now suspected of being dwarf mammoths (as in, members of *Mammuthus*) rather than species of *Elephas*/*Palaeoloxodon* and, in life, these animals might indeed have looked more like the hairy, dome-skulled animal in Rekhmire's tomb [the photo of the section of the painting below is by N. Douek Galante, from Masseti (2001)].

'White (1994) suggested that the Rekhmire tomb elephant could depict a miniature African elephant. At first site this looks unlikely to be right in view of the Rekhmire elephant's hairiness, highly convex back and domed head. But you could play devil's advocate: maybe the artist screwed up (after all, none of the features are as clear as we might like), and is the animal really shown as being hairy? Maybe those lines are meant to be wrinkles. And African elephants can be very brown-skinned.



'As is so often the case with pieces of evidence like this, it's likely that we may never know the truth of the matter. But not only is it fun to speculate, our speculations can mean that we gradually winnow away the possibilities and perhaps get closer to the truth. The notion that ancient Egyptians could have gotten hold of dwarf Mediterranean elephants, for example, is more likely than the more incredible suggestion that they somehow had access to those from a Siberian island.'

And there's always room for a bit of foolishness. Let's end with a new announcement by the French proponent of a number of rather odd ideas concerning the Great Pyramid at Giza. Early, as reported by the CyberScribe,

Houdin declared that the pyramid was build from within, with the structure hiding a spiral 'subway' style tunnel where the blocks were carried to build the upper parts of the pyramid.

Well, that idea sank like a stone, but he is back with a new wild notion. To be fair, the story in 'Discovery' (<http://snipurl.com/1ybl9m>) is filtered through the press, but the announcement is very garbled and a little foolish. Note that the outcome of the study is not only positive, but that Houdon has even declared what contents will be found inside his 'hidden rooms'.

Read on:

'A 3-D simulation of the 4,500-year-old structure suggests an ancient secret lies beneath the desert sand.

* Two secret chambers housing funereal furniture were discovered at the Great Pyramid of Giza.

* The furniture was intended for use in the afterlife by the pharaoh Khufu, also known as Cheops in Greek.

'A French architect campaigning for a new exploration of the 4,500-year-old Great Pyramid of Giza said on Thursday that the edifice may contain two chambers housing funereal furniture.

'Jean-Pierre Houdin -- who was rebuffed three years ago by Egypt in his appeal for a probe into how the Pyramid was built -- said 3-D simulation and data from a U.S. egyptologist, Bob Brier, pointed to two secret chambers in the heart of the structure. The rooms would have housed furniture for use in the afterlife by the pharaoh Khufu, also known as Cheops in Greek, he told a press conference.

"I am convinced there are antechambers in this pyramid. What I want is to find them," he said.

'In March 2007, Houdin advanced the theory that the Great Pyramid had been built inside-out using an internal spiral ramp, as opposed to an external ramp as had long been suggested.

'He proposed mounting a joint expedition of Egyptian antiquities experts and French engineers, using infrared, radar and other non-invasive methods to check out the hypothesis.

'The idea was nixed by Egypt's antiquities department. A Canadian team from Laval University in Quebec will seek permission this year to carry out thermal imaging from outside the Pyramid to explore the theory, Houdin said.'

An astonishing and silly video demonstrating the ideas can be seen on 'MSNBC' (tiny.cc/6x8fd):

Well, that's enough for the CyberScribe this month. See you all here next time.