

IN BRIEF


Kevin Feige to produce new Star Wars film

WASHINGTON
Marvel Studios chief Kevin Feige will develop a new *Star Wars* as part of the franchise's next wave of projects. Feige joins the Lucasfilm team as studio president Kathleen Kennedy prepares for the new chapter of films. Walt Disney Studios owns both Marvel and Lucasfilm. AFP


Croc-spotting drones take off in Australia

CAIRNS
Australia's rugged crocodile country could become safer thanks to drones that were given a test flight on Thursday. The high-tech drones known as "croc spotters" were tested near Cairns, Queensland, patrolling along riverbeds and detecting the reptiles as they went. AFP


Samuel L. Jackson lends voice to Alexa

LOS ANGELES
Veteran Hollywood actor Samuel L. Jackson is lending his iconic voice to Amazon's Alexa. According to the company's website, the Marvel Cinematic Universe star's voice option will be available at an introductory price. Users will be able choose whether or not they would like Jackson to use explicit language. PTI

From the mouths of babes: pots that weaned prehistoric infants

Scientists found chemical traces of animal milk in the ancient vessels

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TOKYO

Archaeologists have uncovered the first evidence that prehistoric ancestors of humans in Europe weaned their infants much the way we do now, using specialised baby bottles to feed them animal milk.

The discovery casts rare light on childhood and child-rearing in ancient humans — an area that experts say has long been overlooked.

"This is the first direct evidence for what babies and infants were eating and drinking in prehistory," said Julie Dunne, the study's lead author and a biomolecular archaeologist at the University of Bristol.

The research, published in the journal *Nature*, focuses on three bowls found in children's graves in Iron and Bronze Age burial grounds in modern-day Bavaria.

Two came from a cemetery complex dating to between 800 and 450 BC, and a third from a site dating between 1200 and 800 BC.

The bowls had narrow spouts and in some cases were shaped to look like animals, details that led archaeologists to suspect they were used as bottles to feed children.

To test the theory they extracted samples from inside the vessels and carried out careful chemical analysis.

They found that two of the bowls appeared to have contained milk from ruminants like cows and the third had traces of non-ruminant animal milk, possibly from a pig or human.

That information, paired with the location of the bowls inside the graves of children, led the researchers to conclude that the vessels



Secrets of the past: A baby is shown feeding from a reconstructed infant feeding vessel of the type, inset, found by archaeologists. ■ REUTERS/HELENA SEIDL DA FONSECA/AFP/INSTITUTE FOR ORIENTAL AND EUROPEAN ARCHAEOLOGY/ AUSTRIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

were used as bottles to wean infants. Other, older artefacts believed to be baby bottles have been found by archaeologists, but without clues to confirm the purpose they served.

Child graves

"It isn't until the Bronze and Iron Age that we find them in child graves, and this is crucial as it allows us to confirm that they are in fact used to feed babies and infants," said Ms. Dunne.

They offer "a rare glimpse into the ways that prehistoric families were attempting to deal with the challenges of infant nutrition and weaning at this inherently risky phase of the human lifecycle," the study says.

How ancient ancestors

practiced weaning — moving a child from breast milk to other foods — could help explain more about prehistoric child-rearing but also the development of human populations.

Some experts theorise, for example, that humans began weaning their infants earlier in life after they moved away from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle and settled into farming life, with access to crops and animal milk.

And mothers who stopped breastfeeding early would have returned to postnatal fertility faster, which may have helped fuel a key population explosion called the "Neolithic demographic transition".

Conversely however, weaning infants on animal

Cute factor

REUTERS
WASHINGTON

While the three objects examined for the study were somewhat plain, others boasted lively shapes including animal heads with long ears or horns and human-looking feet.

"I find them incredibly cute. And prehistoric people may have thought so, too they would certainly have a dual function of entertaining the children just like modern stuffed animals," said archaeologist Katharina Rebay-Salisbury of the Institute for Oriental and European Archaeology of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, a study co-author.

"They testify to the creativity and playfulness we often forget to attribute to our ancestors," Ms. Rebay-Salisbury said.

milk may also have brought new risks.

Breast milk provides young children with complete nutrition in early life, while animal milk does not.

Some risks

And unpasteurised milk also poses a risk of bacteria and infection that could have increased childhood mortality, the study notes.

Further research looking at the remains of prehistoric populations could shed light on whether animal milk caused a spike in infant mortality.

Ms. Dunne said she hoped to expand the research technique of sampling residue from ancient bowls to better understand how other early humans fed their infants.

Paris falls for glamour of India's modernist maharajah

Items from Manik Bagh Palace of Indore go on display

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PARIS

They were India's golden couple of the 1920s and 1930s, two beautiful people who cut a wildly glamorous dash across the globe, being photographed by Man Ray and sipping cocktails with Hollywood stars.

The extraordinary lives and impeccable taste of the yesteryear Maharajah and Maharani of Indore — Yeshwant Rao Holkar II and Sanyogita — are celebrated in a spectacular new exhibition at the Museum of Decorative Arts in Paris.

The pair created a gem of an avant-garde palace on the Malwa Plateau in the heart of India. They became patrons of many artists and designers of their day. Some 500 pieces of modern design from the Manik Bagh Palace in the maharajah's hometown of Indore are being exhibited alongside archival materials.

An oasis of understated but dazzling modernist luxury, the palace was furnished with pieces by Eileen Gray, Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret among others, with art by Brancusi.

The first building in the subcontinent to have air conditioning, it also had a ballroom where the couple could do the foxtrot to the jazz-loving maharajah's collection of 1,00,000 records.

The aesthete prince commissioned the young German architect Eckart Muthesius to create his dream of the future. Together the two men combed the artist studios of Paris and Berlin with art advisor Henri-Pierre Roche — author of the novel *Jules and Jim* — to find the works to fill it.

Muthesius was also asked to kit out the 25-year-old maharajah's sleek new royal train, as well as a barge that was a "vertible floating modernist palace" and do the interiors of his private plane.

He designed, too, a hunting caravan so the prince — who had come to the throne at 17 — could stalk tigers in style.

Despite being bound together in an arranged marriage when she was 10 and he only a few years older,



Clean lines: A visitor observing an image of Yeshwant Rao Holkar II and his wife Sanyogita Devi of Indore at an exhibition in Paris. Featured below is their bedroom designed by Eckart Muthesius in 1933. ■ AFP

the pair were a thoroughly modern couple, said the chief curator Olivier Gabet.

Charming couple

Few could fail to be charmed by the bright young maharani, who shared the maharajah's interests.

"She was involved in all their projects and was treated as an equal by her husband. In fact, they were quite an exceptional couple," said Mr. Gabet.

Clearly deeply in love, the couple had "a magnetic aura".

In fact they charmed everyone wherever they went, whether filmmaker Cecil B. DeMille and actor Gary Cooper in Hollywood, or old world royals like themselves.

The couple did not have long to enjoy their idyll in their modernist home. The maharani died at the age of 22 from appendicitis, leaving behind their toddler daughter, Usha, the present maharani.

The maharajah's artistic adventures pretty much ended with her death, said Mr. Gabet, "which shows just what an influence she had."

After his wife's death, the maharajah went on to marry again twice but his inner life remains mysterious.

He died in 1961 as he was planning to write his autobiography, having burned all his private papers.

Collectors like fashion moguls Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Berge, and the Qatari prince Sheikh Saud bin Mohammed Al-Thani, snapped up much of the couple's furniture and carpets in a legendary auction in Monaco in 1980.

Their modernist "garden of rubies" has been swallowed up by the expanding city of Indore.

The once stately salons of the Manik Bagh have long since been subdivided into offices for the local excise department.

Fashion showers



Shining on: A model presents a creation by Lanvin during the Women's Spring-Summer 2020 Ready-to-Wear collection fashion show in Paris. A little rain did not bother the viewers and participants at the event. ■ AFP

New snake named after Shiv Sena chief's son

Tejas Thackeray spotted the species

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
AURANGABAD

A new species of snakes has been discovered in the Western Ghats in Maharashtra and named after Tejas Thackeray, the younger son of Shiv Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray, for his contribution to the find. Tejas Thackeray spotted the species, named *Boiga thackerayi*, during his research in 2015.

The species falls in the category commonly called cat snakes and belong to the genus *Boiga*, director of the Pune-based Foundation for Biodiversity Conservation Varad Giri said.

"Tejas presented these details to the Foundation for



Boiga thackerayi

Biodiversity Conservation and helped us with further research," Mr. Giri said.

A paper describing the new species was published in the journal of the Bombay Natural History Society on Thursday. 'Tejas' elder brother and Shiv Sena youth wing chief Aaditya Thackeray posted a picture of the snake on Twitter.

Underwater hockey all set to make waves

Unusual sport is ready to make a debut at the Southeast Asian Games, the region's mini-Olympics

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KUALA LUMPUR

Swimmers wearing snorkels and gripping short, curved sticks dive to the bottom of a pool in Malaysia and charge at a puck as they compete in an energetic game of underwater hockey.

Invented in the 1950s in Britain — where it is known as "Octopush" — to help divers keep fit during the winter months, the game has gained a small but dedicated following from Europe to Asia. This year the unusual discipline is set to debut at the Southeast Asian Games, the region's biennial mini-Olympics that attracts thousands of athletes.

At the national aquatics centre in the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur, male and female players donned snorkels, flippers, caps and gloves ahead of a tough practice session.

Underwater hockey is not for the faint-hearted — players shoot around at high



Members of Indonesia's women's underwater hockey team during a training session. ■ AFP

speed, swimming over one another and jostling as they try to hit the heavy puck, and smash it fast through the water.

They occasionally bob up to the surface for a breath of

air before diving back down again. "You need to be able to swim, and you need to be able to hold your breath," said Ishmael Ho, who will captain the Malaysian men's team at the SEA Games —

held in the Philippines in November and December.

"Verbal communication is almost impossible," he said. A match usually consists of two teams of six playing in a space measuring 15 by 25

metres at a depth of two metres, with each half lasting anywhere from 10 to 20 minutes, depending on the tournament rules.

It starts off with teams charging from opposite ends of the playing area for the puck and then fighting it out below the surface as they try to push it into the opposing side's goal. The goals are usually two long trays at each end of the playing area.

Mr. Ho took up the sport as a university student in Wales eight years ago and helped to pioneer it in Malaysia in 2016, playing with a handful of enthusiasts at a public pool outside of Kuala Lumpur.

About 50 people in Malaysia now play the game, with the most dedicated doing four training sessions a week for two hours at a time.

Four gold medals are up for grabs and other teams competing are the Philippines, Singapore, Indonesia and Myanmar.

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