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## Articles You May Have Missed

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**“Capt. Clark’s Signature Restored on Possibly 4 Occasions,”** *The Billings Gazette*, 09/03/2006

Beneath the signature of William Clark etched into the sandstone at Pompeys Pillar National Monument, an interpretive sign explains the significance of the artifact. It reads: “The ground on which Clark stood has weathered away but his signature has not. Because of this remaining physical evidence, the site is one of the few places along the entire Lewis and Clark Trail where you can be assured of standing in the footsteps of William Clark and other members of the Expedition.”

Capt. Clark’s signature is clear and easily legible now, but only because it has been restored and deepened - or possibly re-created - on at least two occasions, and possibly three or four.

In 2001 the Bureau of Land Management commissioned documentation of all the rock art, including Clark’s signature, on Pompeys Pillar. A lengthy section of the report details the documented history of the Clark signature and concludes: “Likely, Clark’s signature only survived through intervention.”

**“From Ruins to Ruined,”** *Los Angeles Times*, 09/07/2006

Myanmar’s regime is obliterating a cultural treasure as it `rebuilds’ ancient temples to bring in tourists. The ancient city of Bagan, which ranks with Cambodia’s Angkor temple complex as one of Asia’s most remarkable religious sites, is now in danger of becoming a temple theme park.

By some estimates, there were as many as 13,000 temples here during Bagan’s peak in the 13th century. Today, the Bagan cultural heritage zone has more than 2,200 temples, along with 2,000 unidentifiable mounds and ruins.

Despite the new construction, Bagan remains awe-inspiring. Some of the largest temples house giant statues of Buddha covered in gold leaf, and some still have original frescoes depicting the life of Buddha. The government decided that turning Bagan, also known as Pagan, into a tourist destination could bring much-needed foreign cash.

It set about making the archeological zone more appealing to visitors, particularly tourists from neighboring

countries such as China and Thailand that are not so critical of the military government. Few Western visitors come to Bagan because of calls by the opposition for a tourist boycott.

**“Pompidou Admits Human Error Caused Works of Art to Fall from Wall,”** *The Art Newspaper*, 09/07/2006

The Centre Pompidou in Paris has completed an internal investigation into the accidental destruction of two works of art which fell off the wall and were shattered during the summer exhibition *Los Angeles 1955-85*.

Peter Alexander’s untitled 1971 piece — a vertical bar of resin nearly eight feet long — was about to be installed last March when art handlers noticed that a small metal ring inserted into the hanging hole on the back was loose. A restorer was called in to glue the metal ring in place, but her instructions to let the glue set for 24 hours were “misinterpreted” by a Pompidou employee who hung the work that same day.

It fell from the wall that night. The Pompidou Center assumed total responsibility for the incident. The investigation did not determine what caused the other work to fall.

Craig Kauffman’s *Untitled Wall Relief* of 1967 is a convex bubble of acrylic-painted Plexiglas whose upper edge slotted into a wall-mounted moulding. After 130 days the piece fell and broke, and a guard and witnesses testified that no one had been near the work.

**“Scientific Investigations Unmask the Secrets of 16th-Century Venetian Painters’ Palettes,”** *Science & Technology*, 9/11/2006

Scientific analysis and historical research reveal that Venetian artists of this period were such skilled colorists because they borrowed materials and techniques lavishly from artisans in various trades.

Artists of the period built their reputations and demand for their oil paintings on the scaffolding of new pigments that were produced by borrowing materials from other trades — glassmaking, ceramics production, and textile dyeing — that were also booming. These materials included colorants that aren’t normally associated with oil painters, such as frit.

Lorenzo Lotto not only used transparent red lake pigments prepared from either madder or kermes, he also added finely ground sand to them to improve their working properties. Other notable colors were the orange tones made from two sulfides of arsenic — the yellow orpiment (As<sub>2</sub>S<sub>3</sub>) and the reddish orange realgar (As<sub>4</sub>S<sub>4</sub>). Ultramarine, which was imported from what is now Afghanistan, was another signature color.

**“Munch Paintings back on Display,”** *BBC News*, 09/13/2006

Two recovered Edvard Munch paintings will go on display in Oslo before they are repaired, say museum officials. Masterpieces *The Scream* and *Madonna* were stolen by two armed men in a daring daylight raid in 2004. Police recovered the paintings in August, and Norway’s Munch Museum said both works had suffered slight damage.

A photograph released by the museum on Tuesday shows a rip in the canvas of *Madonna. The Scream* - painted in 1893 and now one of the world’s most recognisable artworks - suffered less significant damage. Experts say they will be able to repair the paintings, but the restoration process will be painstaking and time-consuming.

They are undergoing technical investigation by police and curators, including efforts to lift fingerprints and DNA.

**“Discovery: The Oldest Writing In North America?”** *The New York Times*, 09/16/06

Writing that is 3000 years old in a language not known before now has been found on a stone in Mexico. Scholars are tantalized by a message in stone in a script unlike any other and a text they cannot read. They are excited by the prospect of finding more of this writing, and eventually deciphering it, to crack open a window on one of the most enigmatic ancient civilizations.

**“Bombs Shatter Lebanon’s Roman Legacy,”** *The Observer*, 9/17/2006

Monuments in two of the world’s most important heritage sites are in need of ‘urgent repair’ as a result of the recent conflict in Lebanon, a United Nations mission to the region has discovered.

A Roman tomb in Tyre and a medieval tower in Byblos have been significantly damaged by the war. The most extreme damage had been seen at the world heritage sites of Tyre and Byblos. At Tyre some of 'the finest examples of imperial Roman architecture in the world' had suffered direct damage, including the collapse of a fresco on a tomb only a few metres from the site's core.

At Byblos the effects of an oil spill - which occurred after the Israeli government bombed a depot in Jiyeh, 15 miles south of Beirut - are more obvious. A team of French experts were to be flown to Lebanon by the French government to instruct 15 to 20 Lebanese youths in the archaeological clean-up operation necessary at Byblos.

**"Wynn Accidentally Damages Picasso,"** *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 09/17/2006

Pablo Picasso's "dream" painting has turned into a \$139 million nightmare for Steve Wynn. In an accident witnessed by a group that included Barbara Walters and screenwriters Nora Ephron and Nicholas Pileggi, Wynn accidentally poked a hole in Picasso's 74-year-old painting, *Le Reve*.

A day earlier, Wynn had finalized a record \$139 million deal for the painting of Picasso's mistress, Wynn told *The New Yorker* magazine. The accident occurred as a gesturing Wynn, who suffers from retinitis pigmentosa, an eye disease that affects peripheral vision, struck the painting with his right elbow, leaving a hole the size of a silver dollar in the left forearm of Marie-Theresa Walter, Picasso's 21-year-old mistress. Wynn plans to restore *Le Reve* and keep it.

**"Australian Petroglyphs Threatened by New Gas Project,"** *CBC*, 09/18/06

The National Trust of Australia is calling for urgent measures to protect the largest collection of ancient rock art in the world, located in the rugged Dampier Archipelago in northwest Australia. The calls took on new urgency Monday, after the state government of Western Australia approved plans to build a gas-processing facility on the Burrup Peninsula.

The National Trust, an independent agency charged with protecting heritage sites, wants a heritage listing for the region and a moratorium on indus-

trial development. There are about one million rock carvings on the Dampier Archipelago, a chain of islands off a remote part of Australia. The carvings are 6,000 to 30,000 years old and chronicle the cultural heritage of ancient Aboriginal societies.

**"Casa Gorordo of Cebu, Heritage Icon,"** *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 09/24/2006

Casa Gorordo in Cebu, Philippines, reopened recently after being closed for a year for extensive conservation work. To protect the structural system of the house, controls have been imposed on the number of visitors allowed to be inside the house at one time.

Casa Gorordo is one of three remaining Spanish colonial-era *balay na tisa* (so called in Cebuano because of its terra-cotta roof tiles) in the Parian district of Cebu City, where the city's first families once lived. Casa Gorordo is the highlight of the Parian today. The low two-story structure is a typical late 19th-century construction.

Capped by a steep tile-covered roof ending in slightly upturned eaves recalling Chinese architecture (and the Chinese ancestry of most Parian residents), blocks of coral mined from the sea enclose its ground floor beneath an upper floor of the finest hardwood once available from the forests. Casa Gorordo serves as the focus for much of the conservation activity in Cebu.

**"Art Smuggler Offers Italy Mystery Masterpiece 'X' to End Trial,"** *Bloomberg*, 09/25/06

A convicted antiquities smuggler has offered to return a previously unknown ancient masterpiece known as "Object X" to Italy in exchange for reducing the jail time and fines he faces for supplying loot to U.S. museums.

A famous artist from the ancient world whose work compares to that of Michelangelo or Leonardo da Vinci created Object X, says the convicted art dealer, Giacomo Medici, who is free while awaiting appeal. The object, which may be a statue, vase, or something else -- he's not saying -- is worth millions, he says.

"It's something they can only dream about," Medici, 68, says of the Italian officials with whom he's negoti-

ating to cut his 10-year prison sentence and 10-million euro (\$12.8 million) fine. "And only I can bring it to them."

Medici's case is part of a broader prosecution that includes Marion True, the former antiquities curator at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, who is on trial in Rome for conspiracy and receiving smuggled art. She denies the charges.

**"A Knife in Our Back',"** *Art News*, October 2006

More details are emerging about the final years of Curator Larisa Zavadskaya, specialist in enamels at the Hermitage Museum. The middle-aged heavy-set diabetic was by all appearances a devoted custodian of art for 30 years and the quiet keeper of thousands of artifacts in the museum's Russian culture department.

She became notorious after her death last year for her involvement in the ultimate inside job: the theft of 221 treasures from the collection in her care. Zavadskaya apparently started stealing to pay for insulin, but this was only the beginning of an odyssey that would involve her son, a Hermitage courier; and her husband, Nikolai Zavadsky, a university lecturer; and at least one mysterious figure said to be the Svengali of the enterprise.

Her death ended it. Her heart stopped and she collapsed at her desk when an inventory of her collection began. The fallout from the heist includes public outrage, long-winded tirades in the media deploring the deteriorating moral fabric of the country, and a museum community in turmoil.

If anything, the theft has increased interest in the museum, bringing record crowds in August, according to museum spokespeople.

**"Communist Relic,"** *Wall Street Journal*, 10/4/2006

When is a relic from a dark past a treasured historical artifact? In Poland, the question is coming to a head in a very public dispute over a rusting large supermarket. Surrounded by unremarkable glass towers, Supersam is a dowdy 34,400 square foot hulk left over from communist days.

This spring, the building's private owners hatched a plan to replace Supersam with a \$65 million shopping

center and high-rise office tower. What they didn't reckon with is the power of nostalgia and the Internet.

Supersam was built in the early 1960s and broke architectural ground for the place and time. Rejecting the then prevailing "anti-cosmopolitan" political/artistic ethos, Supersam was an unabashedly modern and unique aluminum-glass building with a steel roof. With Wal-Mart-like hypermarkets sprouting all over since communism's fall in 1989, Supersam became a local food store, nothing more.

Then the current landlord, before Easter, declared the building structurally unsound and a fire risk. A city inspector duly ordered it shut. Wrecking crews were on the way when a Web site devoted to art history (sztuka.net) swung into action, swearing to save "one of the most interesting and valuable architectural objects in Warsaw."

The site's online petition garnered 2,245 signatures from architects, historians, and other prominent figures in Warsaw's artistic community in a few months; the list was passed on to the government's preservation office with a plea to declare the building, though only 44 years old, a protected site. Polish media took an interest. For the first time in four decades, Supersam was generating buzz.

**"Star Trek Sale Stuns Auctioneers,"**  
*BBC News*, 10/8/2006

A model of the Starship Enterprise has sold for \$576,000 (£308,000) at an auction of memorabilia from 40 years of the science fiction television series.

Before the sale, Christie's auction house in New York estimated the model would sell for about \$30,000 (£16,000). The 78-inch-long (198cm) miniature of the Enterprise-D, used in the title sequences of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, made its TV debut in 1987.

More than 1,000 Star Trek items were sold over three days at the auction. Built by Industrial Light and Magic, the model was first used in the 1987 Star Trek episode "Encounter at Farpoint," and also appeared in the film *Star Trek Generations*. Estimates were regularly surpassed during the three-day auction in Manhattan, with fans spending more than \$7.1m (£3.8m) for set furniture, pointy Vulcan ears, and other props.

**"Over 150 Rare Paintings of Kalari Kovilakom restored,"**  
*The Hindu News*, 10/15/2006

Attacked by moths and termites, over 150 paintings, including a rare original lithograph of Raja Ravi Varma, and manuscripts, are on the road to restoration. The precious paintings are from the 'Kalari Kovilakom' in Kollengode in Palakkad district, which has been converted into an Ayurvedic hotel.

After two years of painstaking efforts, six paintings were restored by the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH). Thirteen palm leaves manuscripts from the palace were brought for restoration and identification.

The manuscripts contained treatments for snakebites, skin diseases, and various other ailments. Ayurvedic remedies had also been mentioned in some. K J Sohan, state coordinator of INTACH, said under the national Manuscript mission, any manuscript-- palm leaf or leather will be preserved. He said a survey conducted in Thiruvananthapuram had stated that there were 10 million palm leaf manuscripts in Kerala.

**"Restoration and Reunification for Berlin's Museums,"**  
*The New York Times*, 11/27/2006

It may be a decade or more before this city's monumental Museum Island finally shakes off the twin legacies of World War II and East Germany's communist regime, but with the reopening of the Bode Museum, this cultural park in the former East Berlin has taken another step toward recovering its place as one of the world's great centers of art.

With the restoration of the Alte Nationalgalerie, or Old National Gallery, in 2001, two of the island's five museums are now in fine shape. After an eight-year, \$209 million refurbishment, the Bode probably has never looked better since its inauguration as the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in 1904.

**"Recovering Pompeii Through Science,"**  
*Latest Science News.com*, 11/01/2006

Artists in ancient Pompeii painted the town red some 2,000 years ago, with a brilliant crimson pigment that dominated many of the doomed city's

wall paintings. Scientists from France and Italy have now reported, in the journal *Analytical Chemistry*, why those paintings are undergoing a mysterious darkening.

The synchrotron light of the European Synchrotron Radiation Facility (ESRF) in Grenoble (France) has provided new insight into this process and what produces it. Scientists have been wondering for many years why the red in Pompeii walls, made of cinnabar (HgS), turns black.

The most commonly acknowledged answer is that the exposure to the sun transforms cinnabar into metacinnabar, which is presented in a black colour. However researchers from ESRF found out that the chemical composition in the altered pieces was completely different to metacinnabar, and that various important chemical reactions had taken place in the different samples.

On the one hand, cinnabar had reacted with chlorine and led to the formation of grey chlorine-mercury compounds. The chlorine came from the sea and possibly "punic wax." On the other hand, the sulfation of calcite resulted in the development of black coating on the painting surface.

So what makes the red turn into black so quickly? "The chemical distribution of the samples is not stable, which means that atmospheric conditions probably play a role in this change of colours," explained Marine Cotte, the first author of the paper.

**"What Lies Beneath: Old Masters Under the Microscope,"**  
*The New York Times*, 11/05/06

New technology is allowing art experts to examine long-held beliefs about centuries-old works as never before. Probing the surface with X-rays or infrared light or dating the work by dendrochronology can reveal much about how a work was actually made.

Such analysis can also uncover many twists and turns in the long trip from the artist's studio to the museum wall. A team of investigators, led by Ron Spronk at the Straus Center for Conservation at Harvard University and Catherine A. Metzger of the National Gallery, poked and prodded centuries-old panels for *Prayers and Portraits: Unfolding the Netherlandish Diptych*, an exhibition of

15th- and 16-century paintings by masters of the Northern Renaissance.

Using advanced imaging and analytical techniques like infrared reflectography, binocular microscopy, and dendrochronology, they succeeded in conceptually “marrying” panels that had been thought to be unrelated — and also issuing some “divorces.”

**“Swede Gives Back Acropolis Marble,”** *BBC News*, 11/10/2006

A retired Swedish gym teacher is the toast of Greece after returning a piece of sculpted marble taken from the Acropolis more than a century ago. Birgit Wiger-Angner’s family held the marble for 110 years, but she decided to return it to Athens after hearing about Greece’s Elgin marbles campaign.

The move has boosted the international campaign to persuade the British Museum to return the Elgin marbles to Athens. The British Museum wants to keep its Parthenon marbles.

This is the second piece of the Acropolis jigsaw to be returned in the past two months. In September, Heidelberg University handed back a marble heel from the Acropolis’ Parthenon. But the British Museum is resisting growing international pressure to return the sculptures prized from the ancient Greek temple by Lord Elgin.

It insists that the sculptures were legally obtained from the authority governing Greece when Lord Elgin supposedly saved the sculpted tablets for Queen Victoria and a grateful nation. It does not seem troubled by the fact that the nationality of that authority was Turkish, because until the mid-19th century, Greece was occupied by the Ottoman empire.

**“Italy Clears Project to Stop Venice From Flooding,”** *Bloomberg.com*, 11/10/2006

Italy’s government today backed the 4.6 billion-Euro (\$5.9 billion) Mose project to build a system of adjustable dikes to protect Venice from high tides that flood the city. The project, slated for completion in 2011, includes the construction of 78 floodgates that can be raised by 110 centimeters (43 inches) to keep water from entering Venice’s lagoon.

High tides now flood the city several times a year, damaging historic buildings and disrupting transport. Mose has drawn criticism from environmentalists for the possible damage the barriers will cause to an already polluted and congested lagoon.

The project risked getting suspended with the arrival in May of the new government of Prime Minister Romano Prodi, which includes the Green party and the Communists, among the project’s fiercest detractors. Mose, which means Moses in Italian, takes its name from an acronym for experimental electromechanical module.

**“A £1Million Art Find Behind the Spare Room Door,”** *The Guardian*, 11/14/2006

Other paintings by Fra Angelico grace fine galleries and great churches or are carefully stored away in bank vaults, growing more valuable by the day. So it was with some astonishment that experts in Italian Renaissance art discovered two works by the Florentine friar hanging behind a door in the spare room of an elderly woman’s two-up, two-down in Oxford.

The paintings will go on sale next year and are expected to fetch more than £1m. More importantly for the art world, the two small paintings are thought to be long-lost pieces from one of the artist’s most important works - an altarpiece from the high altar of the monastery of San Marco in Florence commissioned by the Florentine despot and patron of the arts Cosimo de’ Medici.

The main panel, still at the monastery of San Marco, shows the Madonna and child. Eight smaller paintings of saints, believed to have originally been positioned in two rows of four on either side of the central image, were dispersed during the Napoleonic wars. Six of the eight are in private collections and galleries across the world but two, it turned out, were in the terrace house in Oxford.

**“Rome’s She-Wolf Younger Than Its City,”** *Discovery News*, 11/22/2006

The icon of Rome’s foundation, the Capitoline she-wolf, was crafted in the Middle Ages, not the Antiquities, according to a research into the statue’s bronze-casting technique.

The discovery quashes the long-prevailing belief that the she-wolf was adopted as an icon by the earliest Romans as a symbol for their city. It was thought to be either the product of an Etruscan workshop in the 5th century B.C. or the masterpiece of the 6th century B.C. Etruscan sculptor Vulca of Veii.

On the contrary, scholars have long established that the bronze figures of Romulus and Remus were added in the Renaissance, in accordance to the legend of Rome’s foundation.

Analysis carried out by restorer Anna Maria Carruba during the 1997 restoration of the bronze statue showed that the she-wolf was cast as a single unit. This technique was typically used in the Middle Ages.

**“Temple of Portumnus Restoration,”** *Wanted in Rome*, 11/27/2006

Works have begun to restore the rectangular Temple of Portumnus, frequently and erroneously known as the Temple of Fortuna Virilis. It stands in the Foro Boario or cattle market of ancient Rome, and was dedicated to the god who watched over the nearby river port.

The Temple of Portumnus owes its survival to the fact that it was converted in 872 into the church of S. Maria Egiziaca, named after an Alexandrian prostitute who saw the light. €250,000 have been provided by the World Monuments Fund and the Soprintendenza Archeologica Romana. The money is sufficient for urgent works required to protect an important cycle of mediaeval frescoes and repair damage to the building from a leaking roof and pigeon droppings.

**“Early Sketch of Stonehenge Found,”** *The Guardian*, 11/27/2006

They got the date wrong by some 3,000 years, but the oldest detailed drawing of Stonehenge, apparently based on first hand observation, has turned up in a 15th-century manuscript.

The little sketch is a bird’s eye view of the stones, and shows the great trilithons, the biggest stones in the monument, each made of two pillars capped with a third stone lintel, which stand in a horseshoe in the centre of the circle.

Only three are now standing, but the drawing, found in Douai, northern France, suggests that in the 15th cen-

tury four of the original five survived. Modern science suggests that the stones went up from 2,500 BC, with the blue-stone outer circle somehow transported from west Wales, and the double-decker bus-size sarsen stones dragged 30 miles across Salisbury plain.

There are two earlier images of Stonehenge, one in the British Library and one in the Parker Library in Cambridge, but the Douai drawing is unique in attempting to show how the monument was built.

It correctly shows tenon joints piercing the lintel, a timber construction technique, although in fact the real Stonehenge tenons only go partly into the top stone.

**“Church on the Edge of Rome Offers a Solution to Smog,”** *New York Times*, 11/28/2006

American architect Richard Meier’s church in Rome designed to commemorate the 2,000th anniversary of Christianity, has a coating that not only enhances Mr. Meier’s trademark white sculptural forms -- it cleans itself, minimizing the need for maintenance.

The new material created by Italcementi— which contains titanium dioxide, a white pigment — has another peculiarity. It “eats” surrounding smog. Titanium dioxide had been used in self-cleaning coatings before because of its photocatalytic properties: sunlight sets off a chemical reaction that accelerates natural oxidation.

Upon testing its new compound, however, Italcementi realized that the material could also break down nitrogen oxides emitted in the burning of fossil fuels. The cost efficiency of such products would depend on long-term performance as catalysts tend to lose their effectiveness over time.

Now that Italcementi’s product, TX Active, has gone beyond the testing phase, does it work? Three years after Mr. Meier’s church opened in Tor Tre Teste, in eastern Rome, the bulk of the majestic structure remains remarkably bright, in contrast to the grimy gray joints, which were not treated with the product.

**“Ancient Machine Opened the Heavens,”** *Los Angeles Times*, 11/30/2006

After a century of study, scien-

tists have unlocked the secrets of a mysterious 2,100-year-old device known as the Antikythera mechanism, showing it to be a complex and uncannily accurate astronomical computer.

The bronze-and-iron mechanism, recovered in more than 80 highly corroded fragments in 1901 from a sunken Roman ship, could predict the positions of the sun and planets, show the location of the moon and even forecast eclipses.

The international team of scientists reported today that the 1st-century BC Greek device, the earliest known example of an arrangement of gear wheels, shows a technological sophistication that was not seen again until clockwork mechanisms were introduced in the 14th century.

**“Jackson Pollock’s Bold No. 2 just got Bolder,”** *The Indianapolis Star*, 11/30/2006

For the first time in nearly a half-century, Jackson Pollock’s monumental frieze painting, *No. 2, 1949*, is being seen as the artist created it. One of Pollock’s pioneering paintings from his classic “drip” period, *No. 2* was covered front and back with polyvinyl acetate in 1959 by a well-intentioned museum conservator at the Munson Williams Proctor Museum of Art in Utica.

Application of PVA was a standard conservation practice at the time. Acting like shrink wrap, the veneer arrested the cracking and flaking that was slowly damaging the painting. But it also left a blue-gray sheen that dulled the Indian red background and the layers of glossy colors.

Now, after undergoing conservation treatment at Williams College in Massachusetts, the museum’s masterpiece is back on display. Thomas Branchick, a conservation expert at the Williamstown Art Conservation Center, treated the painting.

Branchick applied ethanol to the front of the painting. The ethanol left the paint untouched, but dissolved the PVA, which then seeped out the back, where it was soaked up using blotters. It took about 30 minutes to apply the ethanol. Branchick said the real time-consuming work came in testing the process and materials.

**“Restoration of Bulgaria’s Boyana Church About to End,”** *The Sofia Echo Daily News*, 11/29/2006

The unique Boyana church in Bulgaria’s capital of Sofia will be opened for visitors at 11am on December 4. Only the eastern part of the church will be opened for visitors.

The church frescoes are considered to be the most impressive masterpiece not only of Bulgarian church painting but also of the whole 13th-century Orthodox art. The church was included in UNESCO’s World Heritage list in 1979.

*And lastly, for something completely different:*

**“Nuke those sponges!”** *Los Angeles Times*, 1/29/07

Most people, confronting a sponge soaked in a disgusting brew of raw sewage containing fecal bacteria, viruses, protozoan parasites, and bacterial spores, would shriek, “Yuck!”

Not so researchers at the University of Florida. They deliberately created the stinking concoction to answer a question: What’s the best way to decontaminate the filthy, pathogen-infested kitchen sponge, found in even the most sparkling, granite-countered kitchen?

Their finding: Zap the sponges in a microwave. Study author and environmental engineering professor Gabriel Bitton said he’d long used the sponge-zapping method. “I decided I was really going to test it scientifically.”

His team found it took two minutes in a regular, off-the-shelf microwave to knock out more than 99% of the bacteria on filthy, wet sponges.

Common pathogens such as *E. coli* and salmonella cause at least 6 million cases of U.S. food-borne illnesses annually. The bugs survive well in damp sponges and cloths. Microwaving sponges and scrubbers about every other day for two minutes at full power will decontaminate them more effectively than putting them through a dishwasher cycle and greatly reduces the danger of food-borne illnesses, the researchers say.

The item has to be completely wet and should not contain metal. And be careful when you remove the items. They’ll be very hot.