

The Sword In The Stone Yields New Evidence In The Quest for the Tomb of Alexander the Great

In 2004 Andrew Chugg published the hypothesis that the corpse identified as St Mark the Evangelist, which was shipped to Venice from Alexandria in the early ninth century, might actually be the remains of Alexander the Great. At that time this suggestion rested mainly on circumstantial evidence, but now a large block of sculpture found embedded in the foundations of St Marks Basilica in Venice just a few metres from the Saint's tomb has been independently identified as a funerary relief from a high status Macedonian tomb of the 3rd century BC. Stone tests have revealed a fossil mix which seemed at first to suggest a Roman quarry near Trieste, but it has recently transpired that the stone used for the core blocks of the pyramid of Cheop's son at Abu Roash in Egypt is also remarkably similar. This pyramid began to be quarried for sculptural stone by Alexander's successors in Egypt, probably in order to embellish their monuments in Alexandria, including Alexander's tomb. Alexandria lies just 100 miles down the Nile from this mostly destroyed pyramid, which would have been the most convenient source of good quality stone for the city at the time.

The ancient sculptural block from the foundation of St Marks in Venice is decorated with high relief representations of typically Macedonian arms, including a circular life-size shield decorated with a starburst symbol (the badge of Alexander's family), a long spear, a pair of greaves (shin armour) and a mysterious single-edged sword of a type known as a *kopis*, which is depicted slung diagonally from a tasselled belt on one side of the stone. In 1998 Eugenio Polito, an Italian academic expert on Greek and Roman armaments, identified this relief as typical of the decoration of high status Macedonian tombs in a monograph entitled *Fulgentibus Armis*. Polito dated the sculpture to the late 3rd century BC and speculated that the stone might have been brought to Venice as ballast from an ancient mausoleum in the eastern Mediterranean.

The stone tests conducted by the *Laboratorio di Analisi dei Materiali Antichi* at the *Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia* showed that the limestone of the block contains numerous fossilised rudists, which are a type of ancient shellfish that went extinct at the same time as the dinosaurs, 65 million years ago. A Roman limestone quarry at Aurisina near Trieste yields stone containing such fossils, but so does a region near the apex of the Nile Delta at Abu Roash, where the pyramid of Radjedef was quarried for sculptural stone by Alexander's successors in Egypt.

Full details of these dramatic developments are given in a new book entitled ***The Quest for the Tomb of Alexander the Great*** by Andrew Chugg, which has just been published and which also includes much other new information on the hunt for Alexander's tomb. It incorporates the author's several academic articles on the subject as Appendices. See Andrew Chugg's website at www.alexanderstomb.com with further details of the new book.

Note that the Jan-Feb 2008 online edition of *Archaeology Magazine* (Vol. 61, No. 1, p.13) has published a poll on the question of which tomb of an historical figure their readers would most like to see discovered. The winner by a huge margin was Alexander the Great, who scored 47% of 2,200 reader votes cast (the next highest were Genghis Khan and Cleopatra, both scoring 18%).

About the Author

In pursuit of a life-long interest in the subject of Alexander the Great, Andrew has been actively publishing on the subject for the past 7 years. He has been researching the history of Alexander's tomb since 1998, including visits to Alexandria and Saqqara in Egypt and culminating in the publication of his first book, *The Lost Tomb of Alexander the Great*, in November 2004. Appearances on the BBC Radio 4 Today program and in a National Geographic documentary followed. Andrew has also had academic articles on the tomb published in the classics journal *Greece & Rome*, in the *American Journal of Ancient History* and in the *Ancient History Bulletin* and has written pieces on the theme for the magazines

Minerva and History Today. In September 2006 he addressed the Eroi conference in the University of Padua on the subject of Alexander's tomb and the Proceedings of that symposium have also just been published. Andrew read Natural Sciences at Trinity College in the University of Cambridge in the UK, graduating with honours in 1985. He currently works as a Technical Expert in Bristol in SW England.

Contact: Andrew Chugg at <http://www.alexanderstomb.com/main/contact/index.html>

The Quest for the Tomb of Alexander the Great



Andrew Michael Chugg

Cover image of the new book



The anciently sculpted block discovered in the foundations of St Marks in Venice. The front face depicts a shield embellished with a central starburst symbol with a spear slanting above it and a pair of greaves to its right. On the left-hand side are the remains of the "Sword in the Stone", an ancient kopis slung diagonally from a tasselled sword-belt: such swords were among the most prominent props in Oliver Stone's 2004 movie biography of Alexander.