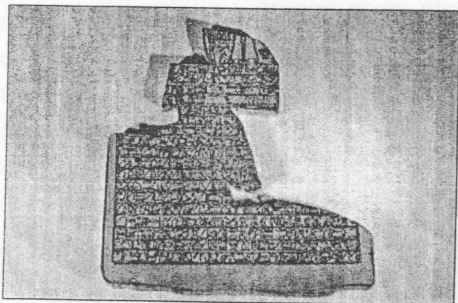


Arabic word. This word means “hunter bird”. Yet it sounds like the French word for secretary.

Some of the birds on the EDGE list are so rare that there are no pictures of them. These include birds called the Cuban kite and the white-eyed river martin. The scientists say that as many as 14 of the listed birds may have already died out. ■

## TEMPEST STELE

Two American scholars have produced a new translation of some Egyptian hieroglyphs that are 3,500 years old. The wording describes a tempest, or very powerful storm, that lasted for several days. The scholars now believe that this storm was caused by a huge volcanic eruption on an island in the Mediterranean Sea. If this is correct some dates used in Ancient Egyptian history must be wrong.



Scaled down recreation of the Tempest Stele

The hieroglyphs were carved on a stone that is called the Tempest Stele. A stele is an upright carved stone block or column. The Tempest Stele was put up, or erected, by Ahmose the First. Ahmose was an Egyptian pharaoh, or king. He is thought to have ruled around 1550 BCE. Historians say that Ahmose’s reign marked the beginning of the New Kingdom. The New Kingdom lasted for about 500 years. This was when Ancient Egypt was at its most powerful.

French archaeologists found several broken pieces of the Tempest Stele between 1947 and 1951. They were dug up near an Ancient Egyptian temple. Unfortunately, not all the pieces were found. So about half the stele’s text is missing. However, many hieroglyphs can be read. They describe the “sky being in storm” and “a tempest of rain”. The stele also says that many dead bodies floated down the Nile River.

Many Egyptologists, or experts on Ancient Egypt, believe that the writing on the Tempest Stele is propaganda. They say that it was not a real storm. Instead the tempest is a metaphorical description of how bad the previous rulers of Egypt were. The hieroglyphs say the storm affected the Nile Delta as well as all other parts of Egypt. So, if the storm was real, it must have been huge. The Nile Delta is where the Nile River flows into the Mediterranean Sea.

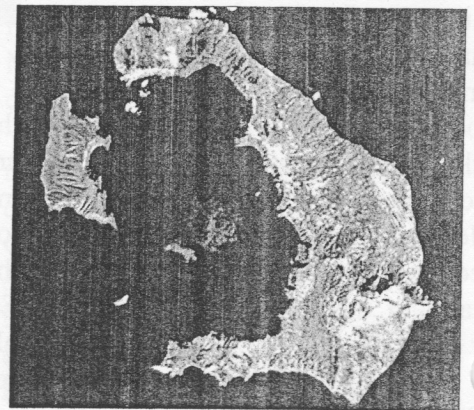
Nowadays, scientists know that some volcanic eruptions can affect the weather. A large eruption will throw volcanic ash and dust high into the air. Winds then spread this ash and dust to different parts of the world. Large amounts of ash in the air can block out the Sun and lower temperatures.

In ancient times there was a huge volcanic eruption on a Mediterranean island called Thera. The central part of the island exploded. The eruption at Thera is believed to have been the largest anywhere in the world for the last 10,000 years.

Today circular-shaped steep cliffs surround a central bay where the center of Thera used to be. This is known as a caldera. These are formed when the ground sinks or collapses after an eruption. At Thera the ground sank below the sea. All that remains of the original island

(which is now called Santorini) is some of its outer parts.

No one knows exactly when Thera exploded. The most accurate date is believed to be between 1627 and 1600 BCE. The eruption sent huge amounts of ash into the atmosphere. It also created a number of huge tsunamis, or giant waves. These destroyed all the towns and cities around the Mediterranean Sea’s eastern shoreline.



Satellite picture of Santorini

If the stele describes what happened in Egypt after the eruption, Ahmose could not have been pharaoh in 1550 BCE. He must have ruled the kingdom about 50 years earlier. During Ahmose’s reign Ancient Egypt suddenly became powerful. The earlier date may help to explain this. Other nearby groups such as the Hyksos seemed to lose power around 1600 BCE. Many of the Hyksos cities were near the coast. These cities were probably destroyed by the eruption’s giant waves. ■

## WORLD’S FAVORITE NUMBERS

Alex Bellos is a writer and mathematician from Britain. He recently organized an online survey. Mr. Bellos asked people what their favorite number was and why they chose it. To his surprise around 44,000

people, from all over the world, completed the survey.

Mr. Bellos says that the survey seemed to confirm that the world's most popular number is seven. This number can often be found in myths and folk sayings. For example, it is Snow White and the seven dwarfs. If you break a mirror it will bring seven years of bad luck.

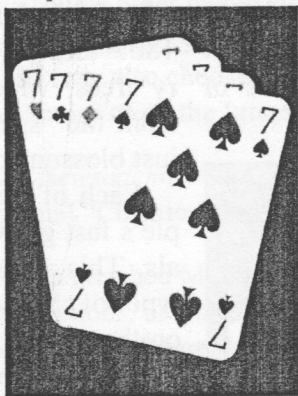
Seven also appears throughout human history. In ancient times there were Seven Wonders of the World. People sailed on the seven seas. They talked of seven continents. Seven planets could be seen in the night sky. There are seven days in a week and seven basic musical notes.

Seven is also a popular number in different religions. There are seven Great Holy Days in the Jewish year. In Judaism the menorah, or sacred candleholder, has seven branches. In Christianity there are seven deadly sins. God is believed to have created the world in seven days (six days and one of rest). In Ancient Egypt people thought that there were seven heavenly cows and seven gates to heaven. The Buddha is said to have walked seven steps when he was born.

In China seven is believed to be a lucky number. This is because the word seven sounds similar to two other words. These are "life" and "arise". Eight is another favorite number in China. Chinese for eight sounds like the word for prosperity. Four is an unlucky number in China, Korea and Japan. In languages used in these countries the word four sounds similar to the word for "death".

No one knows why seven is so popular. Some say that it may be

because, from one to ten, seven is the only number that has two syllables. Mr. Bellos thinks seven's special mathematical properties could be the reason. For instance, between one and ten, seven is the only number that cannot be both divided nor multiplied. One, two, three, four, and five can all be doubled. Nine is divisible by three. Six, eight and ten can be halved. Seven is the odd one out. Seven is also the most common number that can be rolled with two dice.



Around half of those who took part in the survey chose a number between one and ten. Every number between one and 100 was selected at least once. Of the numbers between one and 1,000, 472 were chosen. Numbers ending in zero seem to be unpopular. Those ending in five are also not liked, except for number five. Five was the fifth most popular number.

After seven, the next favorite number was three. Then, in descending order, eight, four, five, thirteen, nine, six and two. Number eleven came tenth. The lowest number that was not chosen by anybody was 110. Could this be the world's "least favorite number"? ■

### "CHICKEN CUP" RECORD

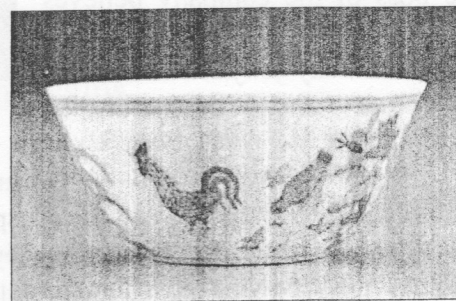
On April 8, a special auction was held in Hong Kong. The auction, or sale, was organized by the Sotheby's Company. During the auction a small porcelain, or china, cup was sold for \$32.4 million. Sotheby's said that the sale set a new record price for Chinese porcelain.

The cup is over 500 years old. It was made during the reign of the

Chenghua Emperor (1465 – 1487). He was part of the country's Ming dynasty, or royal family. Emperors from this dynasty ruled China from 1368 to 1644. China was the first country to produce items made of porcelain. These include vases, cups, dishes, bowls, and plates.

The name porcelain comes from Italy. It is similar to an Italian word for the shell of a certain type of sea snail. Porcelain looks and feels like the inner part of these shells.

By the early 1700s European traders from countries such as Portugal and Britain were making frequent trips to China. They would bring Chinese-made porcelain back to Europe. This is why porcelain items are often called "china" or "fine china".



Chicken cup

Porcelain is made from a special type of clay called kaolin (also known as china clay). The name kaolin comes from Kao-Ling, a village in southeast China. Here there are large amounts of china clay. To make porcelain kaolin is heated to very high temperatures. This is done in specially designed kilns. Europeans did not work out how to make porcelain until several hundred years after the Chinese.

During the Ming dynasty the emperor often controlled the manufacture of porcelain. Chinese craftsmen became skilled at making porcelain items with intricate designs and colors. Today, original Ming china items such as vases are very valuable.