Richard Hodges,  
The Williams Director

On October 1, 2007, Penn Museum welcomed its new Williams Director, Dr. Richard Hodges, O.B.E. His archaeological career began in the late 1960s in his home village in Wiltshire, England, where, as a teenager, he attended a lecture by Duncan Grant King—one of the excavators during the 1920s of the famous British prehistoric site of Avebury. After learning about world archaeology and the great civilizations of Rome, Greece, Mesopotamia, and Egypt, Hodges began to volunteer on excavations, including a Roman villa near Bath, England, and on urban archaeological sites in the town of Gloucester.

In 1970 Hodges enrolled at Southampton University, where he continued to participate in excavation projects while completing his undergraduate coursework in archaeology and medieval history—an unusual combination of fields at that time. He directed his first project in 1972—the excavation of Daw’s Mill, a medieval mill in Dorset—and received his B.A. the following year.

Hodges chose to remain at Southampton to pursue his Ph.D. under the mentorship of Colin Renfrew—now Lord Renfrew of Kaimsthorn—who guided Hodges’ studies in theoretical archaeology and interdisciplinary approaches both to excavation projects and to the interpretation of social institutions. His research applied an archaeological perspective to the study of late Roman and early medieval Europe. In his thesis Hodges modeled changes in the European economy and social institutions during the collapse of the Roman Empire that led to the social and economic foundation of early medieval Europe and, ultimately, helped shape modern Europe. After receiving his Ph.D. in 1977, he began publishing extensively on early medieval towns, trade, and ceramics in both Anglo-Saxon England and on the Continent.

From 1976 to 1988, Hodges held a lectureship at the University of Sheffield, where he taught courses, involved students in field projects, and directed a university outreach program focused on northern England’s Peak District. This examined the use of the landscape from the Mesolithic period (ca. 9,000 years ago) up to the 20th century. Working with students, Hodges developed this into a small archaeological park, Roystone Grange.

In the early 1980s Hodges also began field research on an early medieval monastic site in Italy, San Vincenzo al Volturno. This interdisciplinary archaeological project allowed team members to interact not only with scholars, but also with community groups, local people, mayors, and a variety of other constituencies in order to create a shared vision of the protection and use of the region’s cultural heritage resources—an
During the past decade Hodges has shifted his archaeological attention to Albania. Bringing together a variety of human, technological, and funding resources, he has devised a cultural heritage management program to support young scholars in their research activities, to safeguard archaeological and historical sites and landscapes, to provide training, to help develop capacity for archaeological parks and trails, and to aid in the construction of a museum at the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Butrint.

Richard Hodges brings to Penn Museum his vision of teamwork, interdisciplinary approaches, and the importance of cultural heritage in the 21st century. Penn Museum’s research and collections represent extraordinary resources that can be used skillfully in conjunction with contemporary technology to make scientific research accessible to local, regional, and global audiences. Going forward, Hodges plans to host discussions between Museum staff and relevant professionals outside the Museum in order to achieve a strategic direction for the Museum and its mission in a world that places increasing value on cultural heritage and cultural heritage tourism.

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From 1994 to the present, excavations at Butrint, on the Vrina Plain of Albania, have uncovered a Roman town that was later occupied by a 5th century Christian basilica.