Telling the Human Story

It has now been a year since I took up the post of Williams Director here at the Penn Museum—a year of amazing discoveries, teaching opportunities, programming, exhibitions, and research. The Lod Mosaic, on loan from the Israel Antiquities Authority, attracted large numbers of visitors, around 50% more than the same period the previous year. This remarkable Roman mosaic gave us a wonderful chance to open a window to the Classical World through a wide variety of programs, and our In the Artifact Lab continues to be an unparalleled opportunity for visitors to witness the fascinating conservation work usually done behind the scenes, right here in our galleries.

But this has also been a period of reflection, evaluation, and planning for the future. The Penn Museum is one of the great university research museums of the world but it is also unique in that it has always been equally committed to public engagement. As we contemplated the four central pillars that drive everything we do—excellence in education, research, collections stewardship, and public engagement—we were committed to distilling them into a succinct new mission statement that could become a “North Star” for all of our future initiatives.

I am sure those of you who love museums and view them as essential places of lifelong learning have visited a particular museum, maybe as a child, and seen or heard something that transformed the way you perceived the world and, perhaps, your place in it. At its core, moments like this should be the goal of everything that a museum does. And to this end the new mission statement of the Penn Museum is: The Penn Museum transforms understanding of the human experience.

The Penn Museum through our collections, research, education, and public engagement tells the human story, and over the months ahead, as we work on our new strategic plan, we are committed to sharing it with all of you. During the coming year, we will be working on two new and exciting initiatives, with our new mission as a guide: a phased plan to transform many of our permanent galleries, and the launch of a new archaeological teaching center that will train the next generation of archaeologists at Penn. As our plans come together, I look forward to sharing our ideas with you in Expedition magazine.

In July, Dr. Siggers and Overseer Charles Williams (right) visited the Penn Museum’s archaeological site at Gordion in Turkey.

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