A Research Institution

The Penn Museum’s 2013–2020 Strategic Plan includes four foundational pillars: research, teaching, collections stewardship, and public engagement. In addition to our regular features, the Winter issue of Expedition offers a selection of articles and departmental columns that illustrate recent work in each of these foundational areas, with research as the underlying common thread.

Deputy Director Steve Tinney gives us an overview of the new CAAM labs and teaching facilities, a place where student research is already underway. “Around the World” highlights ten different Penn Museum-affiliated offsite research projects—five from the perspective of our curators and consulting scholars who lead them, and five from the perspective of undergraduate and graduate students who had the opportunity to participate as team members and gain invaluable hands-on experience. “Conserving the Past,” a new occasional column, demonstrates the importance of investigative studies used to evaluate artifacts before conservation.

Our cover story focuses on the upcoming exhibition Beneath the Surface: Life, Death, and Gold in Ancient Panama. This research project began as an excavation conducted by J. Alden Mason in 1940, which resulted in a greater knowledge of the Coclé culture and the addition of many remarkable objects to the Museum collection. Lucy Fowler Williams recounts the history of the excavation, followed by a behind-the-scenes interview with Exhibition Curator, Clark Erickson, and Director of Exhibitions and Public Programs, Kate Quinn.

Michael Danti writes next about his current project in Iraqi Kurdistan, as he searches for the ancient kingdom of Musasir, referenced in contemporary Assyrian texts. Brian Rose and artist Marianne Lovink investigate the techniques that might have been used in creating Roman wax masks and work with students to create actual masks.

Our last article on the Forty Saints church in Albania, while not a Penn Museum excavation, was a project that Richard Hodges and John Mitchell worked on when Dr. Hodges was Director of the Museum. Here, the changing architecture of this important pilgrimage site is revealed.

This issue includes many other short features on topics such as upcoming events, a new exhibition in the Archives hallway, recent acquisitions, and news of interest to Museum members. Thank you for your continued support of the Penn Museum!

JANE HICKMAN, PH.D.
EDITOR
Connections that Last a Lifetime

We frequently hear from people who first encountered the Penn Museum during the formative years of their childhood or adolescence. Some came here as part of a school group, or with their families, or visited for the first time when they were students at Penn. Many have become members so that they can visit their favorite galleries and objects again and again. Longtime member Dave Schwartz, interviewed in this issue, exemplifies someone who understood, even as a child, how much the Museum collection had to offer. He experienced a sense of wonder in our galleries that he has now passed on to his daughter, Jessica. This fall, we launched *Unpacking the Past* (see page 54), which will invite 10,000 7th grade public school students from Philadelphia to the Museum each year with free transportation, admission, and programs. In the years to come, we hope many of these children remember fondly their experiences here. Perhaps they will return one day as Penn students, or with children of their own, to continue the journey of discovery that started in our galleries.

Mission statements are sometimes overly ambitious and aspirational, but certainly there is significant evidence to suggest that the Penn Museum is transforming understanding of the human experience. Our loyal members return time and again to enjoy programming, tour exhibitions, and enjoy our signature galleries. And the Museum’s influence is felt far beyond our walls by means of loans to leading museums everywhere, through our excavations around the world, and through scholarly and popular publications that are read widely.

It came as no surprise when, in February of 2014, the British publisher Dorling Kindersley Limited (DK Publishing) approached us about photographing our objects for their collaborative book with the Smithsonian—*History of the World in 1,000 Objects*. But even we were not quite prepared for the fact that over 200 of the objects featured in the final publication are from our collection! This new volume reminds us that we are stewards of one of the world’s great collections and thus are obliged to maintain the highest standards in our programming, our scholarship, our exhibitions, and our galleries. With the help of our generous supporters—especially now as we prepare to undertake significant renovations to our signature Egyptian, Near Eastern, and Asian galleries—we are ensuring that the Penn Museum will continue to ignite a sense of wonder for future generations in Philadelphia and around the globe.

Julian Siggers, Ph.D.
Williams Director