Students to Analyze 5,000 Year Old Skeleton

Last May, the Penn Museum identified an early burial from the Ubaid period at Ur, dated to ca. 4500 BCE. This was particularly groundbreaking because it shed light on early village life in the Ubaid period in Iraq—a time of transition to agriculture.

Recently, a Penn team, led by Dr. Janet Monge, identified a second full skeleton from Ur, which was excavated by C. Leonard Woolley in 1930. This new, flexed burial, about 5,000 years old, is a skeleton of a person from an early city in the area. A “flexed burial” means the person was buried in a fetal position with the legs and arms bent tightly into the chest and abdomen. This unique find will present exciting research opportunities for students, allowing over 20 undergraduate and graduate students to conduct research in the Museum’s CAAM lab. Working on the skeleton will allow students to experience what it is like to actually retrieve a skeleton from the field. They will learn how to preserve, effectively image, and conserve the specimens for future generations. The team will then consider what techniques to apply in order to extract information about the person during her lifetime. Through this process, students will achieve a deeper understanding of peoples of the past.