

BACKDIRT

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ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE COTSEN INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AT UCLA



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Cover Photo: Mouths of the cave galleries,
Areni-1 Cave Complex, Armenia
Photo: Gregory E. Areshian

THE INSTITUTE IN THE NEWS

Giorgio Buccellati Receives Newly Established Award

FOR BEST PRACTICES IN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE PRESERVATION
OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE OF AMERICA

IN THE FESTIVE ATMOSPHERE of the 112th Annual Meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America, the Founding Director of the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology at UCLA, Professor Emeritus of the Ancient Near East and of History, and Director of the Mesopotamian Laboratory of the Cotsen Institute Giorgio Buccellati received the newly established AIA Award for Best Practices in Archaeological Site Preservation. Upon accepting the congratulations from the Cotsen Institute on this occasion, Giorgio told *Backdirt*: “The title of the newly established award by the Archaeological Institute of America has an interesting ring to it: ‘Best Practices in Archaeological Site Preservation.’ Interesting, because of the stress on *practice*, which implies that something concrete is being accomplished. It was an honor for me to receive this award the first time it was offered, and a cause for reflection.

An honor. I mean it in a sense that goes beyond the obvious. The kind of work I have been doing at Mozan, ancient Urkesh, is not exactly popular. Not only is it not in current practice, but my effort is often viewed with benign indulgence at best. Hence ‘honor’ meant approval and encouragement.

And a cause for reflection. Not being in any way a conservator, the qualification of ‘best practices’ seemed best suited for my approach. What I developed over the years was a special sensitivity for problems, a good dose of common sense in trying to cope with them, and an eagerness to find help wherever I could.

And yet, inevitably, practice turned into theory. The key question revolved around the connection between conservation and site preservation on the one hand and archaeology on the other. The integration of these various aspects became an important goal of mine, and part of the answer came in the form of a major component of the Urkesh website, where data and interpretation are treated extensively.

Besides integration, perception. With regard to the architecture, I was seeking to safeguard the ‘document’ and to present the volumes and their setting in a meaningful way. In so doing, I came to realize how I was trying to identify unifying points of view from which the perception would be best for the visitor, and I came to see how this was an effort, in fact, to capture the points of view from which the ancients were perceiving their own built environment.

Finally, relevance. The effort did not originate primarily as a social service, even though it did serve that purpose well. Not specifically trying to be relevant was in the end a source of relevance for myself in the first place. I was learning, learning from listening to actual questions and to the questions I thought I could anticipate. What better ‘best practice’? ■

