



COTSEN INSTITUTE OF
ARCHAEOLOGY AT UCLA

Backdirt

Spring/Summer 2004

Present at Creation

BY **GIORGIO BUCELLATI**

Perhaps on account of our shared celebratory mood, I revisited recently the intellectual goals I had set for myself at the start of the Institute. I was writing an article entitled "An Archaeologist on Mars" after a book by Oliver Sacks. There, he relates the case of an autistic woman who went on to achieve considerable academic success, but who always felt, she would say, like "an anthropologist on Mars" – meaning that she could tell, but not live, other people's emotions.

Well, my initial goal with the Institute was to wed the social sciences and the humanities so that we could indeed, as archaeologists at UCLA, both *tell* and *feel* the past. This, incidentally, made it relatively easy to sell to the Administration, because within those limits the projected new Institute would cause no appreciable financial burden.

So in my mind, today, the fuller measure of success is that at the Cotsen we are far from being "archaeologists on Mars." The wedding has taken place and is admirably repeated at each encounter among colleagues and students, formally and informally, in the labs and in the rich

discussions that follow each of our seminars and lectures.

Nor is our eponym extraneous to these ideals – far from it. Lloyd Cotsen was a supporter of the Institute as an ideal home for archaeological thought long before he chose to support us even more tangibly for our archaeological work. He, too, was there at creation, and was actively involved in a number of scholarly dimensions (such as being a member of the Advisory Committee and serving as a reviewer of manuscripts for publication). And with Lloyd around, you can't possibly be an archaeologist on Mars.

Blending social sciences and the humanities was not only an idealistic goal of mine; it was also a very practical one. When I first came to UCLA in the distant fall of 1965 archaeology on campus was astir – or I should perhaps speak of "archaeologies." In fact, you may say that the stir was aimed at overcoming, precisely, the plural! At that point the envisaged mechanism was an interdepartmental program of instruction. There was a powerful converging of interests – on the one hand the great stars in residence in our academic universe (Marija Gimbutas, Wally Goldschmidt, Clem Meighan, Henry "Nick" Nicholson), and on the other the enlightened leadership of chancellor Franklin Murphy and several vice-chancellors, first Carl York, then Elwin "Sven" Svenson and David Saxon.

But the converging was so animated by conviction, and so colored by personality, that it developed a dynamism all of its own. Its effervescence made for a brilliant display of alternating opinions, but it could not easily be tamed into a workable program. And so it took four years, between No-

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Director Giorgio Buccellati, members of Institute staff, and associates in the offices in the basement of Kinsey Hall, March, 1982. Pictured left to right are Buccellati, Carol Leyba, Benedlcte Gilman, Katya Hervasa, Tim Seymour, Ernestine Elster, Mary Stancavage, and Pat Campbell Healy.



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November 29, 1965, and March 27, 1969, for four different proposals to be crafted, the last being the one that found all in agreement and led to the beginning of the Archaeology Program in the fall of 1969, under Clem Meighan.

WE SIFT THROUGH RUBBLE (IF ONLY METAPHORICALLY, THANK GOD, IN THE CASE OF OUR INSTITUTE) AND TRY TO INFUSE MEANING INTO THE FRAGMENTS.

These were also my first four years at UCLA. The dynamics of the process was fascinating, and I became progressively attracted by and involved in it. Youth and inexperience made me a good candidate as a go-between, a role I played especially in the formulation of the final proposal of the Archaeology Program. I had two institutional homes, through a joint appointment in the humanities (Near Eastern and African Languages, as the department was then called) and the social sciences (the history department). And I had developed a friendship with two young colleagues in the anthropology department, Jim Sackett and Jim Hill. I was, you might say, certifiably interdisciplinary. And that led to my being the second chair of the Archaeology Program, from 1971 to 1973.

The years 1965 to 1969 were the gestation period for the Interdepartmental Program, and the next four years, 1969 to 1973, were the gestation period for the Institute of Archaeology. The Program had brought a greater sense of common purpose and encouraged collaboration among the faculty. But the establishment of a new Organized Research Unit required greater commitment on the part of the administration, and an even firmer commitment on the part of the campus archaeologists. A committee was appointed in 1969, chaired by a new star who had in the meantime joined our firmament, Pierre Delougaz. I served as his "deputy" and worked very closely on the draft of the proposal and in the negotiations that it required. This process, too, led to a successful issue, and on July 3, 1973, I was asked to serve as the Institute's first director.

Interestingly, the appointment letter shows that I still had to report to two deans, the Dean of the Humanities and the Dean of the Social Sciences. This was, as it were, a formal recognition of the cen-

trality of the intellectual goal that I had always found to be the greatest inspiration, that of blending not so much disciplines as sensitivities. I stressed this ambition in my first annual report (April 15, 1974), from which I may be allowed to quote:

The scope of [our] research interests reaches as far back as there is something to recover from the soil which is meaningful for our understanding of our cultural past. In the pursuit of this goal we are creating, here at UCLA, something which is in line with the best archaeological tradition and yet is, at the same time, unique on the American scene. We do excavate in many parts of the world ... as other institutions also do. We have a variety of leading scholars in the field ... as other institutions also have. We offer a comprehensive program instruction of instruction ... as other institutions are also offering. But we go one step beyond.

The crucial difference is that we can talk to each other – anthropologists and humanists, ecologists and classicists, historians and prehistorians, and so on. From this, a new school of thought is slowly emerging, which is giving flesh and blood to the ideal of a comprehensive interdisciplinary reconstruction of the human past. We are truly an Institute of Archaeology, writ large, without parochial limitations of geography or methodology.

The first Institute office was, as we were fond to say, a drawer in the desk of my history department office in Bunche Hall. The keeper of the drawer was Ilene Swartz, our first staff appointee and a focal point for years to come. The Institute had been established without a physical space or a budget, and a few days after being appointed I had to indicate that I was counting "on the use of at least one room and on a minimum operating figure." The room came a few years later, in the Math Sciences building, associated with a small lab I had there near the mainframe computer. In the meantime, we had continued using the Archaeological Survey space in Haines Hall, but we eventually all reunited in Kinsey Hall, where new, adequate space was also found for Publications, and where we remained until the move to Fowler – a space we owe to the initiative of Chris Donnan.

Much of the new space was in the basement, and it often looked more like a basement than an Institute (writ large!).

Ernestine Ester had been appointed our first director of Publications, and here is the excerpt of a note she wrote to Facilities on March 2, 1983:

We have a long-standing problem – an unsightly safety hazard ... whenever the sprinklers are on outside, or whenever it rains, the water collects in a large, unsightly pool (ca. 6 x 8 ft.) ... [ever the archaeometrist!] ... Another water problem ... occurs only with heavy rainfall, and then, very muddy, dirty water flows from an old pipe opening onto my floor and seeps ... next door. In between all these natural disasters we publish reports on archaeology... It is a good thing that archaeologists are used to working under unpredictable conditions! [ever the field archaeologist!]

I will close our genesis story with another quote that, amusing though it sounds today, reminds us of what a whirlwind of progress has engulfed us all in these few years. On April 7, 1982, I received a letter from the administration stating that a letter I had written "persuaded [them] that a word processing system would be a cost effective solution to several problems in the Institute of Archaeology. Your estimates of cost savings are probably conservative." It was our first computer! The letter went on to describe conditions and modalities under which we could acquire it. What is remarkable is to see not only what a privilege a desktop computer was a mere twenty years back, but also what a vast infrastructure has been set in place in these few years to service something which we now all take for granted.

Present at creation indeed I was, and reflecting back on what it meant makes us all aware of what, ultimately, we do as archaeologists. We sift through rubble (if only metaphorically, thank God, in the case of our Institute) and try to infuse meaning into the fragments. As for the Institute, we are still embedded in a living tradition that adds historical awareness to our search. So it is appropriate, in the celebratory mood that colors our anniversary, to set down on computer screen, and even on paper, the record of a memory that makes us even more committed to the glowing future of what is now the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology.

Giorgio Buccellati, professor of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures and of history, was the Cotsen Institute's first director, from 1973 to 1983.