

# Digging into the Human Past

By Robin Heffler

Archaeological achievements at UCLA and the potential for the field of study have been transformed by a visionary endowment from Lloyd Cotsen.

*Lloyd Cotsen, volunteer and donor at the Institute named in his honor. “This Institute and its leadership,” Cotsen said, “are the vehicles that will carry on a vision of archaeology’s future through the intellectual pursuit of knowledge and adventure.”*



Elizabeth Carter has been conducting archaeological excavations at a site in southeastern Turkey since 1995, unearthing the culture and lifestyle of the ancient Halaf people who thrived between 6000 and 5000 B.C.E. Carter and her team of researchers have found evidence of where the Halaf lived, what they ate and with whom they traded.

Findings by the Carter team were extensive and enlightening, but nothing made an impact on the researchers like the discovery of a mass burial site containing 40 dismembered bodies—including some that may have been cannibalized.

“We’ve found a rather complicated ritual associated with death and burial,” said Carter, a UCLA professor of Near Eastern languages and cultures. “This adds to our understanding of large, complex settlements in the ancient Near East that eventually became Uruk, one of the first large cities in the world.”

## Comprehensive, Interdisciplinary Study

Carter’s research is supported by the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology at UCLA, a nationally-renowned center in the College of Letters and Science that promotes the interdisciplinary study of ancient human societies. Carter is one of 17 UCLA faculty with Institute-sponsored research projects that stretch around the globe, working along with 35 other scholars from 11 campus departments who are affiliated with the Cotsen Institute.

Founded in 1973, the Institute was renamed in 1999 to recognize the contributions of Lloyd E. Cotsen, the former president and CEO of Neutrogena Corp. Cotsen has been a volunteer for UCLA and donor to the campus for more than 30 years, and has a strong interest in archaeology. After working on digs in Greece for more than 20 seasons, his passion for the field led him to donate \$8 million to the Institute, setting the stage for an already-respected archaeology program to reach new levels of impact and achievement.

## Growth and Prominence

“This is the largest program of its kind in North America,” said anthropology professor Charles Stanish, director of the Cotsen Institute, holder of the Cotsen Chair in Archaeology, and newly-elected member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

“Lloyd Cotsen’s gift has transformed us from a small institute into one of the leading archaeology research centers in the world in the course of six years,” Stanish said. “It has allowed us to pursue excellence, expanding the work of the talented people here.”

The results can be seen in the advancement of the Institute’s four stated missions: research, education, conservation and publication.

Stanish's own research is but one example of the far-reaching impact of the Cotsen gift. Stanish studies the evolution of civilizations in Peru and Bolivia, looking at political organizations and economics in the period from 3000 B.C.E. to 1400 C.E.

"The Cotsen gift helped build a museum in Peru that has helped preserve beautiful stone monoliths and to give the Amyara, the local people, a cultural center of their own," Stanish said.

### Expanding Graduate Support and Offerings

Located in the Fowler Building on campus, the Cotsen Institute houses laboratories for regional field research projects, technical labs for the specialized analysis of archaeological materials, classrooms, a teaching lab, meeting rooms and offices. The Institute also trains graduate and undergraduate students on campus and in the field, publishes scholarly books each year, and presents public lectures and other educational programs.

With its education component largely focused on graduate students, the Institute has dramatically increased the availability of support stipends. This, in turn, has helped UCLA to compete for the best students on a level with the other top universities in archaeology: the University of Chicago, the University of Pennsylvania, Stanford, Harvard, UC Berkeley and the University of Michigan.

Prospective students in the Interdepartmental Graduate Program in Archaeology are especially encouraged to apply if their interests can form bridges with disciplines and departments that don't include archaeology—including botany, geology, mathematics, statistics, zoology—and if those interests bring together goals and specializations in the humanities, social, life and physical sciences.

Support for students also includes travel grants, which make it possible for both graduate and under-

graduate scholars to go to another hemisphere and learn archaeological techniques. A field school in Chile is set up just for this purpose. Students assisting UCLA faculty members with their projects receive on-the-job training at excavation sites worldwide.

### A New Emphasis on Conservation Management

A new aspect of graduate student training is the UCLA/Getty Program in Archaeological and Ethnographic Conservation. The program has two primary goals: providing students with a solid educational base and practical training in both archaeological and ethnographic materials, and instilling an appreciation of the distinctive and often complex issues related to significance, access and use of these materials.

Through a partnership with the J. Paul Getty Trust, students study for three years to receive a masters degree in conservation, specifically related to archaeological and ethnographic materials. Faculty and staff at UCLA, the Getty Conservation Institute, and the J. Paul Getty Museum are teaching the first group of six graduate students, who began the program in fall 2005. Training includes instruction in the latest digital imaging techniques to conserve documents.

"This unique program for preserving and curating museum objects goes beyond preparing students to be archaeological technicians by creating leaders in the field of cultural heritage management," said Stanish.

The Getty program staff and faculty also have assisted Cotsen Institute faculty with projects requiring the analysis of objects recovered from excavations, and Stanish has plans to increase Getty participation in digs.

A research project that already has benefited from Getty involvement is the work of anthropology professor Christopher Donnan, former director of the Fowler Museum. Since he joined the UCLA faculty 36 years ago, Donnan, one of the world's leading



Archaeology graduate students Lyssa Stapleton (left) and Jamie Aprile (right) confer with their Albanian colleague, Esmeralda Agolli, at the Cotsen Institute's joint project at Lofkënd, Albania. (Photo: Rich MacDonald)



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*Charles Stanish, director of the Cotsen Institute, at the site of a newly-discovered ancient Inca village in the valley of Tarapacá in the Atacama Desert of Chile. “The Cotsen gift helped build a museum in Peru that has helped preserve beautiful stone monoliths and to give the Amyara, the local people, a cultural center of their own.” (Photo: Colleen Donley)*

experts on ancient Peru, has been studying the civilization of the Moche people, who lived on the north coast of Peru between 200 and 800 C.E. and gave rise to the great civilizations of the New World.

Outside of academic circles, Donnan is perhaps best known for his excavation of the richest Moche tombs ever found, a spectacular collection of artifacts—many of them solid gold or silver—that were featured in a 2001 National Geographic magazine. More recently, through high-tech imaging techniques, the Getty conservation department identified minerals, semi-precious stones and plant materials from Donnan’s Peruvian excavation sites.

“By combining information contained in photos of Moche art held by museums and private collections worldwide with findings from our excavations, we can reconstruct Moche civilization,” said Donnan. “This is one of the few places in the world that can trace the rise of civilization in the increasing complexity of arts, technology and social organization.”

### **Engaging the Public**

Beyond research and teaching, the Cotsen Institute has developed its outreach through an expanded program of publications and public programming.

Publishing research findings has become a highly competitive process at the Cotsen Institute. Stanish said the Institute has increased the quality and quantity of publications, while being selective about the manuscripts it accepts. Publications are written by UCLA scholars, as well as by researchers from all over the world.


The public is invited to a thriving calendar of lectures, seminars and noon “Pizza Talks”—as well as to visits into the workings of the Cotsen Institute itself. In

early May, the Institute held an open house, an annual event that offered tours of the laboratories where 75 archeologists store and analyze their findings. Donnan was one of the tour guides, along with UCLA Bone Lab director Thomas A. Wake, known as the “The Roadkill Scholar” for his work that examines the remains of small animals found at archaeological sites. Visitors viewed and heard about actual tools that gave the Stone Age its name, a system of identifying pottery with microscopic slivers of shard, and ways to use charcoal to deduce ancient agricultural practices.

### **“A Vision for Archaeology’s Future”**

As part of his long-range goals for the Cotsen Institute, Stanish wants to expand public understanding of archaeology in general and the research projects of Institute scholars in particular. He also plans to initiate a summer program in which disadvantaged teens would spend two weeks in the local mountains learning about archaeology.

“We want to enhance programs for the community—for volunteers and donors—to go into the field,” he said. “We plan to work in collaboration with UCLA Extension and the Alumni Association to provide these kinds of opportunities.”

The combination of energetic research, innovative teaching and engaging public programs are all evidence of the dynamic progress in archaeology that was made possible by Lloyd Cotsen’s gift—and are aligned with his hopes for the field’s future at UCLA. Speaking at the ceremony celebrating the renaming of the Institute in his honor, Cotsen said, “This Institute and its leadership are the vehicles that will carry on a vision of archaeology’s future through the intellectual pursuit of knowledge—and adventure.” 

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