

MEET THE ASSOCIATE
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

Loa P. Traxler

ANDREW W.
MELLON
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DIRECTOR

BY MARGARET R.
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IN JUNE 2009, Loa P. Traxler was named the Andrew W. Mellon Associate Deputy Director of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. This position, a new addition to the Penn Museum management team, is designed to oversee the Museum's academic programs, strengthen con-

nections between the Museum and the University, and increase awareness across Penn's campus of the extensive and remarkable collections available to professors and students in many subject areas. The Associate Deputy Director is also responsible for coordinating an interdisciplinary Global Archaeology degree and establishing courses in museology, conservation, and cultural heritage management. Trained as an archaeologist, curator, researcher, and technician, Traxler brings a wide-ranging and well-suited background to this position.

With the creation of the Mellon Associate Deputy Director position, Dr. Traxler looks forward to making the Penn Museum a cultural institution that reaches beyond its in-house and scholarly public, providing expanded opportunities both for students doing Museum-related research and for those who might not be aware of the Penn Museum's holdings. "We are better known across the Atlantic than we are in the Philadelphia suburbs," Traxler has observed.

A trip as a teen to the King Tut exhibit in the late 1970s was awe-inspiring to Traxler; she feels that the Penn Museum has the potential to have the same effect on visitors. Bringing students through the doors and into classrooms and galleries will introduce them firsthand to objects that will have a much different effect in person than they do on the printed page or the computer screen. "We are very sophisticated in recreating the physical experience in a digital age," says Traxler. "That adds to, but cannot replace, a real time, face-to-face encounter" with an object.

While working toward her graduate degree, Traxler worked as a surveying technician at Petra, Jordan, in 1994 and 1995.

David Brill

Growing up in central Indiana, Loa Traxler was exposed to archaeology almost without realizing it. With school classes in Indiana state history, parents who encouraged interest in Native American culture, and family trips to places as diverse as Chicago cultural institutions and the high backcountry of northern New Mexico, Traxler absorbed the breadth and variety of native history, customs, and handiwork. Other museum visits and experiences made Traxler interested in museum work from a young age.

Just after completing her undergraduate degree in art at Manchester College, she made her first trip to Mexico and encountered the Maya sites of Uxmal, Chichen Itza, and Palenque, among others, where the masonry architecture fascinated her. Traxler moved to Pittsburgh, where she worked as a technician in a bio-technology lab at the Mellon Institute. This permitted her to take fine arts classes at Carnegie Mellon University as well as anthropology classes at the University of Pittsburgh, where an archaeology class taught by Dr. Jeremy A. Sabloff (later the Williams Director of the Penn Museum) solidified her interest in anthropology.

Upon arrival as a graduate student in the Penn Anthropology department in 1987, Traxler was still undecided whether to pursue studies in medieval European or Latin American archaeology. As a volunteer on the decorative featherwork exhibit “The Gift of Birds,” she worked on materials from the Peruvian site of Pachacamac, an experience which tipped her interest to the New World. During her early years in the graduate program, she excavated with J. Jefferson Reid in Arizona and with Penn professor Harold Dibble in France. Her first excavation at a Maya site was in Honduras as part of the Early Copan Acropolis Program, where she continued to work every Spring from 1990 to 1998. She spent summers during those years as a surveying technician for the Museum Applied Science Center for Archaeology, working with university students at Petra in Jordan, and with local high school students at Cochiti Pueblo in New Mexico.

In 1998, Traxler left Penn to become the Assistant Curator of the Robert Woods Bliss Collection of Pre-Columbian Art at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, DC. While there, she developed and produced exhibits, oversaw object registrations and served as a courier for loaned objects, supervised collections management and the digitization of the photography collection, and with her colleagues, implemented the first collections database for Dumbarton Oaks objects and visual resources.

After nearly six years at Dumbarton Oaks, Traxler returned to Penn to become the supervisor of the Copan publications effort. Because Penn’s excavations at the site had come to an end, it was important to have someone responsible for assembling the field data, architectural plans, and imagery, and



Loa Traxler maps a trench near Grasshopper Pueblo, Arizona, in 1989.



Following her discovery and excavation of a royal burial, likely that of Copan’s 8th ruler, Traxler continues to work with the artifact collections generated by the Penn Museum’s Early Copan Acropolis Program. A future traveling exhibition focused on Copan will be sponsored by the Museum in collaboration with the Honduran government.

shepherding the Penn Museum’s Acropolis research to publication. In addition, she coordinated the annual Penn Maya Weekend conference, now in its 28th year; oversaw the publication of monographs from other Penn excavations in Central America; and completed her dissertation, receiving her Ph.D. in 2004.

As Associate Deputy Director, Loa Traxler is excited about introducing the next generation of students to the many cultures and points of view represented in the Penn Museum’s collections, and seeing the connections future generations of scholars will make based on their experiences here. 🏠

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