



International Council for Archaeozoology

Mail: Institute of Archaeological Sciences ELTE
1088 Budapest, Múzeum körút 4/B, Hungary

Prof. Dr. Richard Hodges, Director
University of Pennsylvania
Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology
3260 South Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104
USA

February 11th, 2009

Dear Prof. Hodges,

The International Council for Archaeozoology learned with much concern of the University Museum's proposal to close down MASCA (the Museum Applied Science Center for Archaeology), by May 2009, thus eliminating the posts of three archaeological scientists, Drs. Patrick McGovern, Naomi Miller, and Kathleen Ryan. As a world-wide organization, it is our responsibility to summarise the views of all 31 members of our International Committee.

Losing MASCA would create a sad precedent weakening the University of Pennsylvania's excellent reputation within the archaeological and paleobiological community as well as the entire field of interdisciplinary archaeological research. For example, DNA studies combined with more traditional morphological analyses have revolutionized our understanding of the origins of domesticated animals. Remote sensing allows the exploration of sites without extensive excavations. Organic residues have revealed the beginnings of winemaking and dairying. The research carried out by Drs. Ryan, Miller, and McGovern is very much at the cutting edge of these multidisciplinary endeavours.

As an international organization – also represented in many developing countries – we are especially concerned about the future of research by Dr. Kathleen Ryan, a leader in the study of pastoralism and dairying in East Africa. She has collaborated with her African colleagues, including Karega-Munene, and she has received a multi-year NSF grant to support her research.

However, while in principle voicing our opposition to your proposal we understand that financial reality exerts mounting pressure on organizations such as the University of Pennsylvania, a private institution dependent on income from endowments, charitable donations, tuition and overheads charged to granting agencies. We are well aware that these sources have all been affected by the current economic downturn.

We are, of course, unaware of the details that have led to the unfortunate proposal to eliminate MASCA. We would, however, like to note the following based on the considerable international experience of the ICAZ membership as a whole:

- Archaeological science cannot be 100% self-funding. While grants may pay some salaries and expenses, there is also a need for continuing institutional support of personnel, equipment and collections management. This is especially the case in a museum setting, because research does not generate income directly and has to compete with the institution's marketable public activities.

- Financially, the elimination of a program that looks expendable may seem to make more sense than small cuts that weaken multiple programs. However, basic research needs continuity. Once disrupted, the loss is generally irrecoverable.
- As members of ICAZ, we are naturally most concerned about the impact of this decision on Archaeozoology (Zooarchaeology). However, MASCA also represents the intellectual goals of the University as a whole. US universities, as well as the National Science Foundation, stress the importance of research that incorporates different disciplines and approaches to material phenomena, thereby creating scholarly ties across a campus as well as among researchers from different parts of the world. These values are cherished well beyond the borders of the US, and ICAZ wholeheartedly stands for them as well.

For these reasons we urge you to reconsider the drastic step of eliminating MASCA entirely, and encourage you to retain core members who can provide a continuing presence of this important research while still helping to meet the economic goals that led to the decision in the first place.

We appreciate the challenge that a reassessment of your proposal may pose. We still hope, however, that a more academically viable solution can be found, representing a compromise between short-term needs and the long-term scholarly interests of the University of Pennsylvania, interests which are identical to those of the academic community internationally, because interdisciplinary archaeological science, including archaeozoology, represents the future of archaeology as the window on most of our past.

Sincerely yours,

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