

# CONTEXT



Polly Peterson, archaeology graduate student and administrative assistant in ICEAACH, provides a tour of Boston University's Department of Archaeology to a delegation of distinguished archaeologists from China (see page 16).

## *Two Millennia at the Great Plaza of La Milpa* **The Persistence of Memory**

by Norman Hammond and Gair Tourtellot

Almost exactly sixty-five years ago, on March 30, 1938, the noted Maya archaeologist J. Eric S. Thompson arrived at a jungle-shrouded ruin in the far northwest of British Honduras, a Crown Colony on the east coast of the Yucatan Peninsula, bordering on Mexico and Guatemala. The site had been reported by a *chiclero*—a tapper of *sapodilla* trees in the rainforest—and reputedly had at least fourteen carved stelae. These monuments, which we now know were dedicated by Classic Maya kings on important occasions, bear inscriptions in Maya hieroglyphic script recording dynastic history, usually with a date in the Maya Long Count which enables the monument to be correlat-

ed with a precise date in our own calendar; most Maya stelae were dedicated between A.D. 300 and 900.

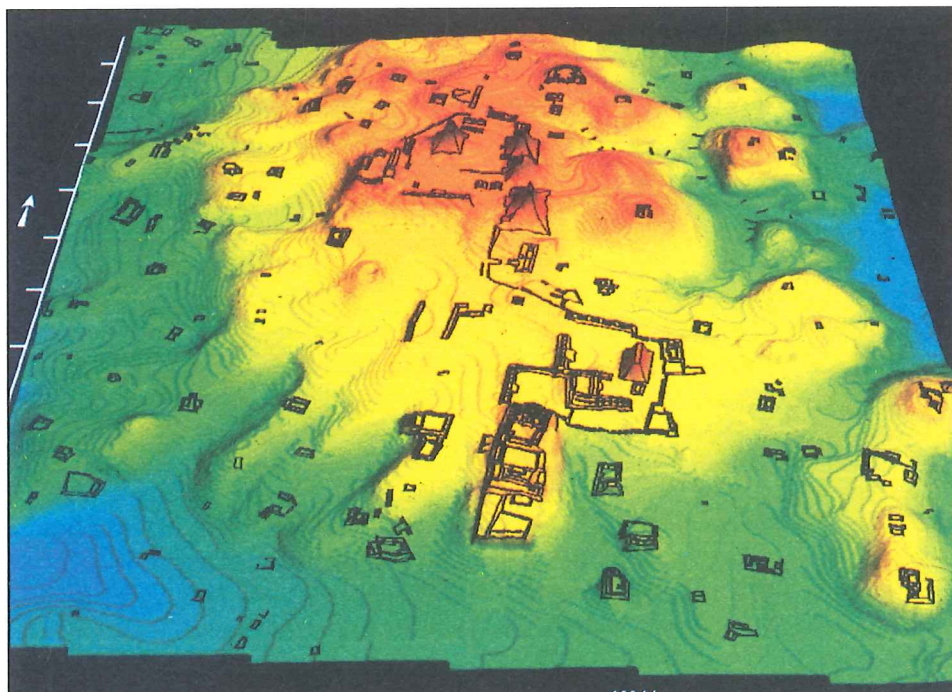
The Carnegie Institution of Washington, where Eric Thompson worked for the Division of Historical Research, had long been concerned with accumulating as many dated monuments as possible, although in 1938 neither the historical nature nor the phonetic structure of the texts was yet known. New sites were still being discovered with some frequency (and continue to be found even today), and northwestern British Honduras, now Belize, was an unexplored region.

Thompson named the ruin "La Milpa," "the cornfield," because the

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The site core of La Milpa from the south, with the palatial acropolis in the foreground. The Great Plaza occupies the ridgetop to the north. (GIS by Francisco Estrada Belli).



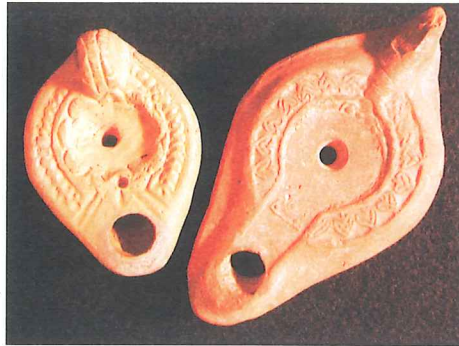
# The Archaeology Museum

by Priscilla Murray

A small archaeology museum has been established in room STO 253 in the Department of Archaeology. Refitted with storage cabinets and drawers; work areas for artifact conservation, labeling, and study; a small library, and glass-fronted cases for display, the museum provides a sorely needed resource for the study and display of the department's artifacts. With the help of graduate students Kim Berry and Ben Thomas a computerized catalogue has been set up, and students from the Undergraduate Archaeology Club have undertaken to help with the difficult task of numbering every artifact in the collection. Students who have worked with us so far include Christine Dziuba, Laura Eustice, Jenni Henecke, Ghazale Jamsheed, Susan Mentzer, Amanda Watts, and Donna Yates.

What is in the museum? In addition to fossil hominid replicas, there are three principal collections at present. The Mitchell collection was assembled by Charlie Mitchell, a retired cowboy, who knew Custer and Bill Cody, and who eventually settled in Needham, Massachusetts. His collection of chipped and ground stone tools has a great variety of types from

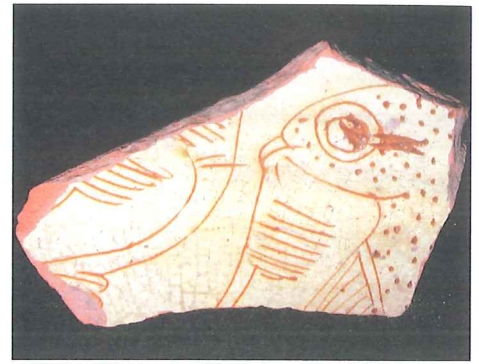
virtually every part of the United States, especially Kentucky, Missouri, Massachusetts, and Tennessee. Running to nearly 2,500 pieces, it is invaluable for study. The James R. Wiseman collection consists of pottery, lamps, coins, figurines, flint and obsidian tools, fresco fragments, and other artifacts from Greece. Almost all periods are represented, from prehistoric through Ottoman times. Professor Wiseman was permitted by Greek authorities to remove this study collection to the U.S.A. for edu-



*Two late Roman lamps from the collection donated to the museum by Professor Wiseman.*

cation purposes. Finally, there are artifacts collected in Africa by former Archaeology Department Professor Creighton Gabel. Professor Gabel's collection includes Palaeolithic stone tools, Iron Age pottery, and prehistoric copper and bronze artifacts.

Parts of the collection have been used for teaching purposes. Clemency Coggins, Chantal



*Byzantine sgraffito sherd with a bird depicted on the right.*

Esquivias, Michael Hamilton, Abbi Holt, Patricia McAnany, Satoru Murata, Robert Murowchick, and Curtis Runnels have borrowed materials for lectures and presentations. Professor McAnany's arrangement of skulls, stone tools, beads, pigments, and other artifacts in one of the hallway display cases last semester formed the basis for student research papers in her AR100 class and attracted a great deal of attention from passers-by.

The following student research papers were based on the museum collections: Leslie Harlackner, "The Victoria Falls Middle Stone Age: A Study in Lithic Technology, 1997"; Jessica King, "An Analysis of Unprovenienced Chipped Stone from the Mitchell Collection, 2002"; Daniel Leonard, "Ground Stone Tools from the American Northeast, 2002". We hope that students will continue to make use of the collections for research projects such as senior honors theses. Research topics could include Classical (Greek) vase painting, the Late Stone Age in Africa, Nazca (Peru) pottery motifs, Archaic arrow and spear points of the eastern U.S., and much more. The museum curators, Curtis Runnels and Priscilla Murray, invite more use of the artifacts by members of the Department and Center. Please feel free to stop by and view the possibilities. There is still a need for cataloguers. Also welcome are donations of artifacts that were not illegally removed from the country of origin: we are growing!

*Priscilla Murray is a Research Fellow in the Department of Archaeology at Boston University.*



*Priscilla Murray, Curator of the Museum, points to a piece of painted decorated wall plaster held by graduate student, Ghazale Jamsheed, who works as a volunteer.*