2025

INVENTING A NEW DISCIPLINE

EIGHTH ANNUAL BULLETIN

Your Initiative for the Science of the Human Past at Harvard, and our Max Planck-Harvard Research Center for the Archaeoscience of the Ancient Mediterranean wrapped up 2025 with a wide variety of new projects, discoveries, and collaborators from across the globe.

By Emma Hammack

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FROM PROFESSOR McCORMICK'S DESK

As we moved through 2025, I saw daily the resilience and creativity of our researchers, students, and collaborators in the face of mounting challenges. The Science of the Human Past at Harvard continued to champion rigorous, collaborative, and innovative scholarship uniting the humanities and sciences to explore our deep human story. However, recent political and institutional funding cuts struck painfully close to home, including within SoHP's distinguished Steering Committee. Funding for crucial research programs led by Walter Willett, whose monumental Nurses' Health Study advanced our understanding of women's health in the recent past, and Christina Warinner, whose 2024 Nature publication revealed insights into ancient microbiomes through the SPAAM program, was tragically cut short (you can read more about the latter in Prof. Warinner's Gazette interview).

Despite these losses, our community pushes forward. The National Institute of Preventive Archaeological Research of France (Inrap) praises our collaboration through the Max Planck–Harvard Research Center for the Archaeoscience of the Ancient Mediterranean (MHAAM), highlighting the global reach and impact of our work. Our recent lightning talk session in Cambridge attracted a strong and engaged audience, and we look forward to more collaborations in the future.

The work we do here shapes our understanding not only of the past but also the future we build from it. From senior professors working on ancient –and modern-- pathogens such Streptococcus to a gifted undergraduate analyzing modern plague outbreaks, our work on ancient biomolecules increasingly sheds new light in modern medicine as well as ancient history. I invite you, our readers, and supporters, to help us safeguard and expand this work. In these times, even modest contributions preserve discoveries and insights that might otherwise be lost to history... and 21st-century science.

Together, we can ensure that the Science of the Human Past continues to illuminate the path ahead.

Michael McCormick,
Science of the Human Past
Harvard University, December 2025

PUBLICATION HIGHLIGHTS

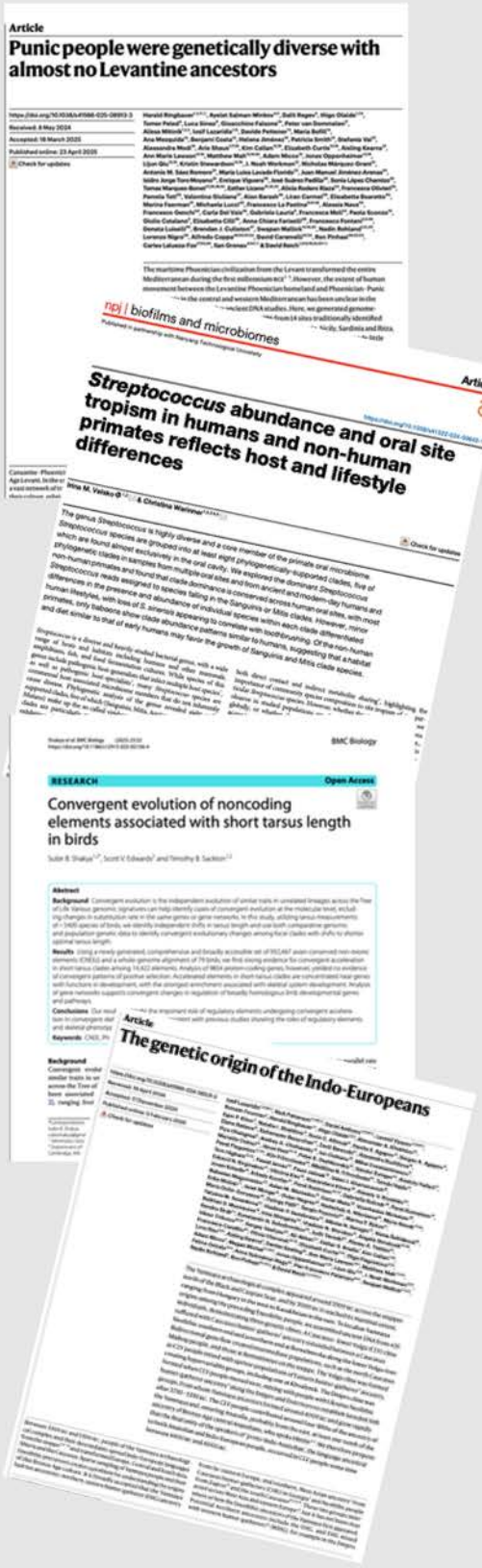
Click on image to access the study

- Yet another recent *Nature* study from David Reich's lab revealed that the Punic people, who colonized the western Mediterranean, showed significant genetic diversity but surprisingly little ancestral connection to the Levant. Ancient DNA from sites in Sardinia, Ibiza, and North Africa indicates rather that these populations were mainly local Mediterranean groups. These new findings **challenge the idea of a direct Levantine lineage** and will force us to rethink our understanding of ancient Phoenician migration, colonization, and cultural integration across the Mediterranean basin.

- Christina Warinner's lab authored a landmark study **mapping how Streptococcus species colonize different areas of the mouth in both humans and non-human primates**. By comparing ancient and modern samples, the research reveals how host biology, diet, and lifestyle shape oral microbial communities over time. These findings have important implications for understanding the co-evolution of humans and their microbiomes, as well as the origins of oral health and disease.

- Scott Edwards and colleagues examined tarsus length evolution in nearly 5,400 bird species, analyzing almost one million conserved non-exonic (i.e., non-protein coding) genomic elements. They identified over 14,000 regulatory sequences with accelerated evolution in short-tarsus lineages, with no similar pattern in protein-coding genes. The findings **reveal the pivotal role of regulatory DNA in driving parallel skeletal adaptations,** making this large-scale comparative genomics study a huge step in understanding convergent morphological evolution as a broader organismic process.

- Nick Patterson authored two high-profile *Nature* papers this year. "The genetic origin of the Indo-Europeans," uses ancient DNA to trace the origins of the Indo-European language family to steppe herders who migrated across Eurasia more than 5,000 years ago. By pinpointing a genetic signature shared from Ireland to India, **the research clarifies yet further a centuries-old debate over how these languages spread, building on the 2015 pioneering study in *Nature* and deepening our understanding of prehistoric migration and cultural exchange.**



To access all of our 2025 Publications, see the SoHP website.

IN THE PRESS

Researchers from the Science of the Human Past and MHAAM have garnered international attention and accolades for their groundbreaking work and commitment to world-class scientific research at the intersection of history, archaeology, and genetics. Click on images to listen or read.

New genetic sleuthing **traced the roots of the Uralic languages—including Hungarian, Finnish, and Estonian—back 4,500 years to ancient Siberians** in what's now Yakutia, a region "closer to Alaska or Japan than to Finland." The findings upend traditional theories placing the proto-Uralic homeland near the Urals, illuminating how migrations through the taiga laced together language, culture, and ancestry across Eurasia. The paper, out of **David Reich**'s lab, was covered in articles from the Gazette to Finnish outlets.

Northeastern Siberia, Figure from *Nature* article

In a groundbreaking PNAS 2025 Perspective, **Tina Warinner** argues that in a rapidly changing world—with climate change, pandemics, and biodiversity loss—natural history collections are irreplaceable. Yet, in under-resourced nations like Mongolia, these critical archives are teetering on the brink. The authors call for urgent, equitable global partnerships to build infrastructure, digitize collections, and empower local scientists—ensuring that these cultural and biological treasures inform future environmental resilience.

In December of 2025, **Walter Willett** was awarded the Dr. Ancel Keys Award at the American College of Lifestyle Medicine's annual conference in Grapevine, Texas. The Dr. Ancel Keys Award, awarded only every three years, honors ground-breaking work in the public health and population science sectors. Dr. Willet and his work were featured in Forbes, on CNN, and the Washington Post, amongst many others.
Unsurprisingly,Walter also received recognition again this year as one of the Research.com Best Scientists in Medicine, underscoring his ongoing global leadership in nutritional epidemiology

Joyce Chaplin's new book, *The Franklin Stove: An Unintended American Revolution*, was published in March 2025. Dr. Chaplin gave a series of talks on the book, which tells the story of Franklin's remarkable invention against the backdrop of nascent environmentalism and concerns about the effects of industrialism. Joyce spoke at the American Philosophical Society, C-SPAN's Book TV, as well as with Harvard's Gazette and Magazine.

EVENTS AND PROGRAMS

Click on image to access lectures/websites

In October, Science of the Human Past (SoHP) at Harvard welcomed partner researchers from the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology for a workshop on their new study.
The research identified two individuals buried in early medieval cemeteries in southern Britain whose DNA suggests recent sub-Saharan African ancestry. Focusing on a young girl buried at Updown in Kent, the study explores the world she lived in and the wider connections her presence reveals—linking Britain to North Africa and the Mediterranean, possibly in the wake of the Byzantine reconquest of North Africa in AD 533–534.

The event was distinguished by commentary from Harvard professors Orlando Patterson and Emmanuel K. Akyeampong, whose expertise in sociology, history, and the African diaspora brought critical depth to the discussion. They reflected on how these findings reshape our understanding of identity, movement, and cultural exchange in the early medieval world. Joining them were Dr. Joscha Gretzinger (Max Planck Institute) and Professor John Hines (Cardiff University). The Gazette also covered this important event, which can be viewed on our YouTube channel.

MAPS, by the Numbers

Mapping Past Societies (MAPS), our vast geodatabase with visual, geospatial and analytical capabilities, continues to open up new avenues of study for historians and researchers. Some at-a-glance data on its growth since the 2024 launch:

- MAPS has become the first and third of the 10 most visited Harvard ArcGIS Online layers of all time.
- In 2025, our most popular layer got over 6 million hits (6,250,799 to be exact), averaging 17,125 per day.
- MAPS on average gets 56 users a day.

In March of 2025, and in partnership with the Harvard Museums of Science and Culture, SoHP's Christina Warinner gave a packed lecture on **Mongolia's Unique Role in Dairy's History**. She spoke on the transformations of milk into dairy products over 9,000 years ago in the Near East, and explores how such an unlikely and often indigestible food (the majority of the world's population is estimated to be lactose intolerant), became a staple of global cuisines.

In May, Warinner then gave an extended presentation on her work on "The archaeology of microbes and the future of lost genomes" at the Nobel Symposium "Paleogenomics: charting the future of ancient DNA" in Stockholm, Sweden. The symposium was the first time a Nobel Symposium focused on ancient DNA and the archaeology of microbes.

EVENTS AND PROGRAMS, CONTINUED

Darryl Campbell, Jakub Kabala, Emily Ding, and Michael McCormick

Three generations of Science of the Human Past alumni were present for the special lecture, **Ancient DNA illuminates the Origins and Early Migrations of the Slavs**. Darryl Campbell (‘06), Jakub Kabala‘(04), and Emily Ding (’26) to hear about the transformation of Europe by the Slavs in the six and seventh-centuries. Drs. Joscha Gretzinger and Zuzana Hofmanová, from the Leipzig arm of the Max Planck - Harvard Research Center for the Archaeoscience of the Ancient Mediterranean, presented their work alongside comments from Serhii Plokhii (Mykhailo S. Hrushevs'kyi Professor of Ukrainian History, Harvard University) and Dr. Kabala (Associate Professor of History and Film, Media, and Digital Studies, Davidson College).

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In the Heat of Discovery: From Southern France to Justinian’s Lost City

A summer whirlwind tour took SoHP Chair Michael McCormick to meet present and potential future collaborators in a very hot southern France, followed by a week in the remote and even hotter Balkans, exchanging ideas inspired by the remarkable work of the joint Franco-Serbian project uncovering the startlingly monumental but short-lived new city that Roman emperor Justinian built out of nothing on the site of his birth in the 530s CE.

FUTURE LEADERS: OUR STUDENTS AND POSTGRADS

Reed Morgan, SoHP Doctoral Candidate in History, ABD

Reed was back on campus at Harvard for the past year, teaching for courses in the Science of the Human Past and Roman archaeology. Reed also taught Environmental History to incarcerated men at a prison throught the Tufts Prison Initiative. Reed continues to analyze ancient DNA results from across the ancient and medieval Mediterranean, with new data in the past year from Tunisia, Spain, Albania, and Greece. In the summer, he dug with Harvard professor Margaret Andrews at the Roman site of Falerii Novi, worked in our sister labs in Leipzig, and supervised an undergrad researcher mapping Late Roman ceramic distributions for Mapping Past Societies (MAPS).

Anika Christensen

Harvard College ‘26, Human Evolutionary Biology and Music, Adams House

In 2025, Anika began an independent research project investigating the role of climate change in Madagascar plague outbreaks from the 20th century to today. Having recently demonstrated a relationship between temperature shifts and annual outbreaks, she is now in the process of testing whether such temperature shifts have affected mutation rates in the Yersinia pestis (plague bacillus) genome. Anika hopes her results can help explain a 2017 outbreak of the highly dangerous and formerly rare pneumonic plague, by assessing Malagasy Y. pestis genomes for increased substitution rates, perhaps enabling the bacteria's infection of the lungs. This research serves as the foundation of her senior thesis in Human Biology, Behavior, and Evolution, which she is completing with the support and mentorship of Dr. Gayani Senevirathne and Prof. Terence D. Capellini. In August, and thanks to funding support from SoHP, Anika also spent a week at the Max Planck Institute in Leipzig. There, she worked with archaeogenetics researchers to further develop her methods and to design a research proposal extending this work to ancient plague outbreaks.

Kyler Hoogendoorn-Ecker

Harvard College ‘27, Comparative Literature and Germanic Languages and Literatures, Dunster House)

Kyler spent the summer working on mapping Late Roman ceramic find sites across the Mediterranean under the guidance of Michael McCormick and Reed Morgan. He created a database of African Red Slip ware types found at each site, and developed GIS visualizations of that data. By mapping the data from the database, he was able to analyze patterns in Mediterranean trade in the late and post-Roman periods, and create a new resource on Mapping Past Societies that will serve archaeologists and historians around the world.

FUTURE LEADERS: OUR STUDENTS AND POSTGRADS (CONTINUED)

Victoria Moses

SoHP and Getty postdoctoral fellow

In 2025, Vicki's postdoctoral research project that brings together ancient DNA, historical, and archaeological evidence from the Near East and broader Mediterranean during Classical Antiquity is moving forward. She continues to collaborate with Dr. Alison Barton on their Getty Dual Postdoctoral Fellowship project under the guidance of Professor Michael McCormick and Professor David Reich. Vicki and Dr. Barton co-presented their research at the Science of the Human Past lightening talk event in February, and Vicki presented at the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) conference in April with a co-authored paper entitled, "Movement, Connections, and Cultural Contact between the Near East and Neighbors during Classical Antiquity through Ancient DNA (aDNA)." Over the summer, Vicki's fieldwork took her to Sicily, where she worked at the site of Segesta analyzing zooarchaeological evidence of the ancient diet and the environment and collecting samples for human aDNA analysis. In November, she will present a co-authored paper on aDNA from the Halzi Gate (Nineveh) at the American Society of Overseas Research (ASOR) conference. Outside of presenting SoHP projects for scholarly and public audiences, this fall she will continue her research on the human past using multidisciplinary approaches in ancient DNA.

Alison Barton

Dual SoHP and Getty postdoctoral fellow

In 2025, Alison continued her Getty Dual Postdoctoral Fellowship in the Reich Laboratory, collaborating with Dr. Vicki Moses under the guidance of Professor David Reich and Professor. Their joint project integrates ancient DNA, historical sources, and archaeological evidence to investigate mobility, connectivity, and population structure in the Near East and broader Mediterranean during Classical Antiquity. Within this broader agenda, Alison and Vicki have been leading a project focused on Classical-period Libya, examining genetic diversity and population dynamics in both urban coastal centers and more remote interior settings to assess how geography, connectivity, and imperial networks shaped local communities. Alison and Vicki co-presented aspects of their Getty-supported research at two Science of the Human Past events during the year, including most recently at the October lightning talk session. In addition, Dr. Barton presented related work in ancient DNA at several international conferences: the Human Evolution – From Fossils to Ancient and Modern Genomes meeting at the Wellcome Trust in the United Kingdom in April, the Society for Molecular Biology and Evolution conference in Beijing over the summer, and the annual meeting of the American Society of Human Genetics in October. These presentations drew on her broader portfolio of research connecting ancient DNA and biology. Alongside these activities, Alison continues to assist in developing multidisciplinary approaches that combine genetic, archaeological, and historical data to illuminate patterns of human mobility and interaction in the ancient Mediterranean world.

FUTURE LEADERS: OUR STUDENTS AND POSTGRADS (CONTINUED)

Solenn Troadec

SoHP and Richard Lounsbery Foundation postdoctoral fellow

Solenn Troadec is concluding her exploration into the health and human genetic past of France (500-1000CE). Her year took her to France for a final sampling campaign, which brought the project to 280 individuals sampled, and more than 450 in total added to the MAPS atypical burial layer. This represents the biggest investigation into the genetic past and study of atypical burial practices of early medieval France to date. This was, of course, only made possible by her continued collaboration with numerous French research centers amongst which the French National Research institute for preventive archaeology (Inrap). The signature in April 2025 of a convention between MHAAM and Inrap strengthens this continued collaboration for years to come, and is already producing new international projects.

STEERING COMMITTEE HIGHLIGHTS

Margaret Andrews

Recently, I published a review of Annie Montgomery Labatt's *Byzantine Rome* in Speculum (vol. 100, no. 2), reflecting my ongoing interest in the ritual and urban worlds of late antique and medieval Rome. As co-director of the *Falerii Novi Project*, I helped lead our June 2025 excavation season, which continued open-area stratigraphic work while training students in stratigraphy, ceramic processing, environmental sampling, and digital recording. My lab's 2025 outreach included features such as a Yale Peabody story highlighting how Falerii Novi illuminates everyday Roman life. In addition to these, my first book, entitled The Subura of Rome: Landscape and Ideology from the Iron Age to the Middle Ages, is now in production with Cambridge University Press.

Joyce Chaplin

In 2025, I published The Franklin Stove: An Unintended American Revolution (Farrar, Straus and Giroux), exploring how Franklin's invention reflected early American responses to climate and energy challenges. Harvard Magazine ran an excerpt from the book in its May–June issue under the title "The Franklin Stove — A Historical Climate Change Adaptation." I also contributed essays for wider audiences, including "What Ben Franklin knew about climate change — in 1740" in The Washington Post and "How Benjamin Franklin's Cold Feet Led to a Revolutionary American Invention" in LitHub, both in March 2025. Together, these publications highlight my ongoing interest in the intersections of technology, environment, and culture in early America.

Scott Edwards

My lab continues to leverage the rich resources of the specimen collections in the Museum of Comparative Zoology, and to merge fields such as genomics and phenotypes to study phylogenetic genotype-to-phenotype mapping in birds, especially skeletal and limb traits. I co-authored "Convergent Evolution of Noncoding Elements Associated with Short Tarsus Length in Birds" (Shakya, S. B.; Edwards, S. V.; Sackton, T. B.), published in BMC Biology in February 2025. This study draws on a dataset of ~5400 bird species, whole-genome alignments, and regulatory element annotations to show that convergent changes in conserved non-exonic elements (CNEEs) correlate with independently evolved shorter tarsi across multiple avian clades. Additionally, I engaged in speaking and outreach in 2025, including a lecture titled "Bird evolution: from dinosaurs to DNA," which discusses how modern genomics and fossils together reveal the deep ancestry of avian traits.

STEERING COMMITTEE HIGHLIGHTS

Peter Huybers

As part of my interest in addressing key questions about climate variability, solar forcing, and agriculture, I co-authored "Re-evaluating Historical Sea Surface Temperature Data Sets" in Geophysical Research Letters, "Negative trend in total solar irradiance over the satellite era" in PNAS, and "Climate change increases the interannual variance of summer crop yields globally" in Science Advances. I was also appointed interim faculty dean of Kirkland House, beginning July 1, 2025. My group continues to explore climate–water–agriculture interactions, refine sea surface temperature reconstructions, and investigate how changes in extremes shape food systems.

Nick Patterson

The problem of how the very large family of Indo-European languages originated and spread has been considered for more than 200 years. Many thousands of archaeologists, linguists and now geneticists have worked on this. I have been working on the problem since 2007 and because of the availability of ancient DNA, we now understand what happened, at least in broad outline. A paper (lead authors Iosif Lazaridis and myself) has now been published: "The genetic origin of the Indo-Europeans" (Lazaridis, I., Patterson, N., Anthony, D., et al.), published in Nature (vol. 639, 8053, Mar 2025). I also worked on some samples from Ancient Ladakh, which provide information about the early genetics of the Himalaya region. A paper is in submission.

David Reich

So far this year, my lab has published a number of papers on population history based on ancient DNA, "The Genetic Origin of the Indo-Europeans" which traces likely early Indo-European speakers to the Caucasus–Lower Volga region between 6000-7000 ago; another study identifying the likely deep origins of the Uralic language family using newly sequenced Siberian genomes; and "Punic people were genetically diverse with almost no Levantine ancestors," which challenges long-held assumptions about the populations of the western Mediterranean. In addition to these research findings, I have given several public lectures in autumn 2025, including "Who We Are and How We Got Here: Ancient DNA as a Window into Human History and Biology" at the Radcliffe Institute.

Stuart Shieber

My recent research includes "Inverting the Turing Test" in American Scientist. The publication offers a reflection on how contemporary AI developments reshape Turing's original proposal. I also co-authored the ICLR-2025 submission "From Explicit CoT to Implicit CoT," which explores new methods for internalizing chain-of-thought reasoning in language models. On campus, I led Fall courses in computational linguistics and human–computer communication.

STEERING COMMITTEE HIGHLIGHTS

Jason Ur

In addition to teaching, I spent the summer continuing to coordinate the geospatial mapping of Colonial burying grounds in the greater Boston Area. I've now flown 38 burying grounds via drone and have recorded over 17,000 monuments fully or at least partially. I also continued the exploration of Cambridge's colonial past by collaborating with Aja Lans to deliver a talk at the Harvard Peabody Museum titled "Death and Burial in Colonial Cambridge," where I and Lans showcased noninvasive methods like digital mapping and photography to study historical burials. Additionally, I authored an abstract for the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) 2025 meeting, titled "Postmortem Segregation in the Colonial Cemeteries of Greater Boston," further demonstrating his ongoing engagement in mapping and interpreting colonial burial landscapes.

Daniel Lord Smail

In 2024-25, I gave a plenary lecture at the conference "Digital Approaches to Cultural Heritage," hosted by colleagues at the University of Innsbruck, as well as papers and lectures at conferences and seminars sponsored by the Santa Fe Institute, the Universitat de Lleida, the Università di Bergamo, the International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, Harvard's Graduate School of Design and Department of History, and the American Society for Legal History. Our digital project on the material culture of European societies, the "Documentary Archaeology of Late Medieval Europe," continues to flourish and attract international attention. My latest book, "Magdalena Coline: A Life Beyond Mediterranean Slavery," is forthcoming from Princeton University Press in November of 2025. I published "Visual Pharmacy: Historical Pharmacopeias," with Mackenzie Cooley, in *History of Pharmacy and Pharmaceuticals*, 66:2 (2025): 257-74, as well as "Accorpare valori nell'Europa tardomedievale. Il caso di Marsiglia," in *Gli oggetti come merci nel tardo medioevo: fonti scritte e fonti materiali*, edited by Federico Zoni and Riccardo Rao, 23–37. Milan, 2025. My 1999 book *Imaginary Cartographies* has also just appeared in an Italian translation under the title *Cartografie immaginarie: Mappare il possesso e l'identità nella Marsiglia bassomedievale* (Firenze University Press, 2025).

Christina Warinner

This year I was awarded the Robert W. Sussman Award for Scientific Contributions to Anthropology by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), and I was an invited speaker at the 2025 Nobel Symposium in Stockholm, Sweden. I published a Cell article on the early evolution of plague in Eurasia, and two new studies on prehistoric population dynamics in Mongolia and Kazakhstan. My public engagement included leading the event Making Milk: Mongolia's Unique Role in Dairy's History and chairing the CARTA symposium Ancient DNA – New Revelations in San Diego. Our work on dental calculus, featured in The Scientist and Harvard Anthropology news, has offered fresh insights into prehistoric diets and lifestyles, even as I spoke out about looming funding challenges for ancient DNA research.

STEERING COMMITTEE HIGHLIGHTS

Walter Willett

In 2025, I was a co-author on "Alcohol intake and pancreatic cancer risk: An analysis from 30 prospective studies across Asia, Australia, Europe, and North America," contributing cohort data and dietary analyses to clarify how alcohol relates to pancreatic cancer risk. Beyond publications, I spoke on public nutrition policy and planetary health, including opening remarks at the "Exploring strategies for improving nutrition and planetary health" symposium (Thich Nhat Hanh Center, Harvard Chan) and a guest seminar titled "Is there a path to healthy and sustainable diets for all?" hosted by UCI's Department of Epidemiology. In the media, I was quoted in a Harvard Health Blog piece, "Less butter, more plant oils, longer life?" outlining evidence about butter vs. plant oils and mortality risk. I also raised concerns over the potential loss of over 1.5 million frozen biological samples from long-running nutrition and chronic disease studies if funding is not secured, as reported in Harvard Chan News.

Michael McCormick

Thus far this year, I continued my work on the late antique and medieval worlds through teaching and research leadership. I offered HIST 29: The Fall of the Roman Empire in Fall 2025, guiding students through the interplay of archaeoscience and history to illuminate Constantine's reign, climate change, migrations economic upheaval, women's power, and pandemic disease. I continued co-directing the Max Planck–Harvard Research Center for the Archaeoscience of the Ancient Mediterranean (MHAAM), advancing collaborations that link historical sources with archaeogenetics and environmental science. As chair of the Initiative for the Science of the Human Past (SoHP), I helped celebrate our Science of the Human Past/Max Planck-Harvard collaboration with France's Inrap during my 2025 visit with their leadership and our marvelous French collaborators, and I supported our undergraduates' research through projects such as the SHARP/BLISS initiative Mapping the Export Economy of Roman and Post-Roman Africa. I also participated in SoHP's video lecture series, continuing to share insights on the intersections of history, climate, and health; as well as contributing as a co-author to various SoHP and affiliate publications. Lastly, I was deeply honored to deliver one of the Mid-Year Commencement remarks for our wonderful 2025 graduates.

Mohan Hathi, Dean David Demin, Michael McCormick, Arjun Purohit, Sarah C. Karmon, and Charisma Chen during the Mid-Year Commencement ceremony.

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Our key SoHP-affiliated center exploring pandemic history through DNA and science, MHAAM (Max Planck–Harvard Research Center for the Archaeoscience of the Ancient Mediterranean): https://www.archaeoscience.org/