

John L. Cotter Award in Historical Archaeology



Sandra Analía Guillermo

Sandra Analía Guillermo is the recipient of the Society for Historical Archaeology's 2015 John L. Cotter Award for her 2009–2011 work on the Aduana Taylor site in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The award was presented to Ms. Guillermo at the 48th Annual Conference on Historical and Underwater Archaeology in Seattle, Washington.

Sandra Guillermo is an Argentinian historical archaeologist. Her undergraduate degree in archaeology is from the University of Buenos Aires, and she is currently in the graduate program at that institution. She has been working on prehistoric and historical period sites, and in the laboratory in Argentina, since the 1990s, most often as a volunteer in the early years, to gain experience and because of her love of archaeology. In 1995, she began her involvement with urban historical archaeology and worked under the direction of Dr. Andrés Zarankin. From 2004 to 2009, she worked on various urban archaeological projects under the auspices of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología y Pensamiento Latinoamericano (National Institute of Anthropology and Latin American Thought) of the Ministerio de Cultura de la Nación (National Ministry of Culture) of Argentina. She has published the results of her work both in Argentina and internationally, and regularly presents papers in her home country and elsewhere.

She was nominated for the Cotter Award for her 2009–2011 work on the Aduana Taylor archaeological site, which included parts of the old fort of Buenos Aires and a very large

customs building (*aduana*), dating from the second half of the 19th century, located in the center of Buenos Aires. Excavations at the site were part of a larger, multidisciplinary project, *Obra y Puesta en Valor de la Aduana Taylor* (Construction and improvements on the Aduana Taylor parcel), that had as one of its principal objectives the construction of the Museo Nacional del Bicentenario (National Bicentenary Museum) in that location. No one believed that archaeological deposits were still present, as urban development there had been intense for centuries. The results surprised everyone, because the project yielded over 28,000 artifacts that dated from the 16th through 20th centuries, as well as significant architectural remains from the 19th-century customs building, some of which had not been described in historical documents of the period. These finds are rewriting the history of urban development in Buenos Aires and clearly demonstrate the significance of the site and the value of urban historical archaeology in Argentina.

The importance of the site stemmed from the fact that subsurface remains of the Aduana Taylor Building were still present. The Aduana, named in honor of its builder, the English engineer Edward Taylor, was the first public building of its size in the city, shaped by a “shunting yard” built over what had been the moat of the old fort of Buenos Aires. A manual mechanical system and other infrastructure facilitated the movement of merchandise in the yard. A corridor of galleries with administrative functions paralleled the shunting yard (100 m long by 20 m wide) for its entire length. The complex also included a three-story semicircular warehouse, where goods were stored, and a wooden pier that extended 300 m into the waters of the Río de la Plata.

Ms. Guillermo directed archaeological work during the two-year construction project. She and her team completely investigated the shunting yard and the galleries and uncovered part of the entrance to the warehouse. Some of these spaces had up to 7 m of fill containing cultural materials. In addition to recovering thousands of artifacts spanning over half a century, the team found the original floor of the shunting yard and a group of structures internal to the building that had not been known from contemporary or later documentary sources. The latter discovery furthered knowledge of the internal workings of the building.

The archaeological work was conducted as a salvage operation, but was carried out in an integrated, interdisciplinary fashion. Given the grand dimensions of the site and the fact that the archaeological investigations were carried out simultaneously with construction, Ms. Guillermo designed a plan of work based on a flexible decision-making process that allowed the strict overall project schedule to be met. She employed a digital recording system, ensured that earthmoving activities were continuously monitored during construction, and carried out intensive archaeological excavations in the form of test pits, trenches, and block excavations. Taken together, these methods constituted a novel approach to conducting urban archaeological investigations within the footprint of an ongoing construction project in Argentina.

She also focused extensively on developing the capacities of her team, working with them daily on the appropriate application of archaeological methods. It is also important to recognize her commitment to disseminating and sharing the results of the work, not only while it was in process, but after the fieldwork was completed. Outreach extended to the companies and employees involved in the construction, as well as to her academic colleagues. She organized guided site visits and prepared and presented lectures and seminars. Much of this outreach about Argentinian heritage, as revealed through the work at the Aduana Taylor site, was done *ad honorem*. Her efforts and the interest they generated among academics, the public, and the companies and employees involved in the project influenced the decision by the government of Argentina to preserve and display a portion of the excavated remains in situ, following established international norms for conservation and preservation. This was a significant achievement, as this course of action is not a frequent occurrence in her country.

This work was a significant turning point in Ms. Guillermo’s career, undertaken after she had received her bachelor’s degree with honors from the University of Buenos Aires. Her experience while working as a student on archaeological projects throughout the country served her well, but applying it to the historical archaeological context of the Aduana Taylor Project was an intensive learning experience. She had acquired a broad range of archaeological experience

while working as a student, but this was her opportunity to apply her knowledge in an urban historical archaeological context in which she was managing and directing the work. From an academic point of view, Ms. Guillermo's work at the Aduana Taylor site has been unprecedented in the urban historical archaeology of Argentina for the scale of the excavations and the quantity and diversity of artifacts and architectural remains recovered, as well as for her interdisciplinary research approach, innovative field methods, capacity-building training for her team members, and outreach activities.

In 2010, while she was still conducting fieldwork, she presented a paper in Toledo, Spain, on her work at the Aduana Taylor at an international congress on transforming archaeological sites into museums (Guillermo 2010). A project synthesis followed the next year (Guillermo 2011). She has also published on the origins of Buenos Aires (Guillermo 2012) using information from the old fort and the Aduana Taylor. The Toledo presentation was later published in 2013 in the acts of that congress (Guillermo 2013a); see also Guillermo (2013b). Currently, she is working on her dissertation at the University of Buenos Aires, which will focus on analysis of some of the materials recovered from the Aduana Taylor site.

Sandra Analía Guillermo has made exceptional contributions to the field of historical archaeology in Argentina through her efforts at the Aduana Taylor site—fieldwork, publications, and commitment to public and academic outreach and interpretation. This work provides a firm foundation for the expansion of urban historical archaeology in Buenos Aires and beyond, and has raised public consciousness of the importance of protecting the archaeological patrimony of Argentina.

References

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