

## J. C. Harrington Medal in Historical Archaeology



María del Pilar Luna Erreguerena

María del Pilar Luna Erreguerena (Pilar) is the recipient of the 2011 Society for Historical Archaeology (SHA) J. C. Harrington Medal in Historical Archaeology. In 1997, Pilar was recognized with an award of merit from the SHA for her work to that time. She has continued to devote her life to archaeology, most notably to the field of underwater archaeology in Mexico, which includes research, protection, management, and interpretation of prehistoric, pre-Columbian, and historical heritage sites, as well as to international advocacy for underwater cultural heritage (UCH). The J. C. Harrington Medal represents formal recognition by her peers of her pioneering and sustained achievements and contributions to the field. It is fitting that Pilar received this prestigious award at the SHA's annual conference in Austin, Texas, a location near the border with Mexico that provided Pilar's family members and Mexican friends and colleagues the best opportunity to attend and witness her receipt of this lifetime-achievement award. Texas is also the location from which two of Pilar's earliest colleagues and friends in underwater archaeology, Donald H. Keith, president of Ships of Discovery, and George F. Bass, founder of the Institute of Nautical Archaeology (INA) traveled and brought with them seeds of knowledge that encouraged her to devote her life to the protection and management of the world's UCH.

Pilar has done more than any other person to bring scientific underwater archaeology to Mexico. Former chief of the Submerged Resources Center of the U.S. National Park Service Daniel Lenihan expressed in his letter of support of Pilar for this award that

while considering such fortunes of birth writ large in nations and small in individuals, it occurred to me that Pilar's parents showed prescience in picking the name. It means *firme* or *sustentadora*, in Spanish and translates its subtext well to the word "pillar" in English—that which offers firm, upright support for a superstructure, not unlike a national program which needs thoughtful, yet unwavering leadership.

She has labored unrelentingly at this task, often vigorously opposed, criticized, and even threatened by treasure hunters, bureaucrats, prejudiced scholars, and navy officers. Pilar had to win over literally scores of officials in Mexico's sprawling bureaucracy, ranging from oceanographers to admirals in the navy. Over the last three decades, Pilar and her team have been Mexico's sole defense against numerous all-out efforts by foreign treasure-hunting companies to search for and salvage shipwreck sites in Mexican waters. It has been a lonely struggle, and she has often been sustained by the moral support received from her international archaeology colleagues. Lenihan aptly expressed:

It is my conviction that Mexico has played the key role historically in the growth of underwater archaeology in the New World. Since the work of Edward Thompson at Chichen Itza in 1907 that focused on Mexico all the conflicting forces of antiquarianism, romanticism, true archaeology and predatory nationalism—up to the modern day attentions of maritime treasure hunters—Pilar's home has been a centerpiece of the storm.

I have watched Pilar over the years move carefully but with a certain stolid confidence and sure sense of purpose through rough seas in Mexican and international politics. She has maintained a staunch sense of what cannot be compromised away in the name of mature consensus. That trait has served historical archaeology well in Mexico specifically and Latin America generally.

When opportunities arose to work with Pilar's team in Mexico, my response to eager subordinates who enjoyed working with their Mexican colleagues was usually—"find a way to do it, this place is really worth it." When asked why I felt so strongly, the answer was simple, "because Mexico is Mexico and because Mexico has Pilar."

Pilar is a native of Tampico, Mexico, with fluency in Spanish, English, French, and Italian, having studied languages and general culture at the Stella Viae School in Rome, Italy. She is the youngest of five children, born to Spanish parents, who had her baptized in the Cathedral of Tampico, between the Mexican and Spanish flags, on the anniversary of Columbus's arrival in the New World. Although they did not always understand her passion for the cause of UCH, her family faithfully encouraged her studies and supported her decision to pursue archaeology. She obtained her bachelor's degree in archaeology from the National School of Anthropology and History, and her master's degree in anthropological sciences from the National Autonomous University of Mexico.

Indeed, Pilar may have been destined to become an underwater archaeologist. She was born with a love of the sea; as a youth she loved to swim for hours, just for the pleasure of it. In her early twenties, she was the first person in Mexico to teach children with Down syndrome how to swim. In 1975, she won two championships in underwater navigation and two gold and four silver medals in an underwater techniques competition. That same year, she participated in her first underwater archaeology project at Chunyaxché Lagoon, Quintana Roo, Mexico, with Dr. Harold Edgerton under the direction of Dr. Nancy Farris. She returned to terrestrial work, and in 1978, while a young professional working on the excavations in downtown Mexico City, in the Templo Mayor of the former Aztec city of Tenochtitlán, she made a unique discovery, unearthing an enormous conch shell carved in precise detail without the use of metal tools, out of pink and gray andesite, a volcanic stone. The artifact is so unique and rare that in 1980 it became the central piece of the first exhibit of pre-Columbian art held in the National Palace of Fine Arts in Mexico City. Today it is prominently displayed at the Templo Mayor site museum and was also featured on the 10,000-peso bill.

As a student in the National School of Anthropology and History in the early 1970s, Pilar took an interest in underwater archaeology, realizing that Mexico has a tremendous variety and wealth of such sites, from cenotes in Maya ceremonial sites to shipwrecks along Mexico's Gulf, Pacific, and Caribbean coasts. By the late 1970s, she convinced the authorities of the National School of Anthropology and History to sponsor a series of lectures on and exercises in underwater archaeology. In the words of Donald Keith, "During this class we discussed how to grow underwater archaeology in México—which we quickly perceived was more than Pilar's professional ambition, it was her passion."

In 1979, Pilar traveled to Turkey to gain field experience with the INA under George Bass, working on two ancient shipwrecks from the Hellenic and Byzantine periods at Serçe Limani. It was a life-changing experience from which she emerged even more committed to the cause of underwater archaeology in Mexico. Long before traveling to Turkey, Pilar and three students prepared a proposal

to create a program dedicated to underwater archaeology, and presented it to the general director of Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH). Historian Flor Trejo calls this the "foundational document" because it envisions all that has been completed so far and more that is still to be accomplished. It took Pilar eight years of lobbying and passion to succeed in convincing INAH to create the Department of Underwater Archaeology in 1980. She is the founder and has been the head of the department since that time, and has also served as a member of several of Mexico's archaeology and cultural heritage organizations.

During her career, Pilar has directed projects in Mexican marine and continental waters and has worked internationally not only in Turkey, but also in the Cayman Islands with Roger C. Smith (1980), Jamaica with Donny L. Hamilton (1983), and with Donald H. Keith in the Bahamas (1986) and Panama (1990) in fieldwork sponsored by Ships of Discovery. One of her main concerns has been to promote the participation and commitment of official and private institutions and specialists in other disciplines in underwater archaeology projects.

In the midst of these accomplishments, Pilar completed her master's thesis in 1982, entitled "Underwater Archaeology." She graduated cum laude, and her thesis was recommended for publication.

Among the first projects that Pilar initiated and carried out are the survey and test excavation of 16th- and 18th-century shipwrecks on Cayo Nuevo Reef in the Bay of Campeche (1979–1983); the survey and sampling projects in the Media Luna Spring (1981–1982); the relocation and test excavation of an early-16th-century shipwreck site in Bahía Mujeres (1983–1984, 1990); the survey of Chinchorro Reef (1984); the mapping of Maya "lighthouses" along the east coast of the Maya Peninsula (1984–1985), which led to a successive project on pre-Columbian aids to navigation (1985–1989); the cooperative mapping of the USS *Somers* with the U.S. National Park Service (1990); the relocation and test excavation of a 17th-century shipwreck near Isla Contoy (1994); and the study and conservation of shipwreck artifacts now housed in the museum of Garrafón, a state park on Isla Mujeres, all in Quintana Roo. Of that first project on Cayo Nuevo Reef, Donald Keith remarked:

It could be argued that Mexican underwater archaeology was born during that first expedition to Cayo Nuevo in late November, 1979. Far from the classroom, it was not a simple, safe, learning exercise. It's just as well that we didn't know the Bay of Campeche is not a good place to be in winter. Pilar saw recovery of the bronze cannon as an opportunity to draw attention to her efforts to jump-start underwater archaeology in México, and was willing to lay everything on the line to stage a high-profile raid on Davy Jones' locker. It was the first of what eventually became three expeditions to Cayo Nuevo and the crucible in which Pilar's mettle was tested. For that matter, we were all tested—but Pilar had the most at stake. A lot of important people were looking over her shoulder.

In 1994, Pilar engineered an intensive master's level course in underwater archaeology offered through the National School of Anthropology and History and open only to applicants already holding or nearing degrees in archaeology or conservation. She invited colleagues Donald Keith, Jack Hunter, and Monica S. Hunter from the United States, and Steve Willis from Canada to teach and provide their insights into the practice of underwater archaeology. The first of its kind in Mexico, the course was a tremendous success and, as a result, Pilar's department was upgraded within INAH in 1995 to become the Underwater Archaeology Vice-Directorate. Its aims are to protect, preserve, research, and disseminate information about Mexico's submerged legacy.

Pilar's ongoing commitment to training new Mexican underwater archaeologists is evident. Every year she invites renowned specialists from different parts of the world to give minicourses and share their knowledge and experience with Mexican underwater archaeologists, as well as conservators, biologists, historians, students, divers, and fishermen, among others. Chris Amer, state underwater archaeologist of South Carolina, observed that "Pilar has been instrumental in bridging the gulf between professionals and watermen by engaging them in the process of discovery, identification, and registration of shipwrecks and other submerged cultural resources."

More recently a third course in underwater archaeology, "Research and Management in Underwater and Maritime Archaeology" took place in Campeche from 27 September to 8 October 2010. It was sponsored by UNESCO and INAH, and 20 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean were invited to send participants. Of these, 14 countries sent 27 professionals from the fields of

archaeology, anthropology, law, conservation, cultural resource management, and undergraduate students in archaeology and conservation. One of the important outcomes was the creation of the regionwide *Organización Latinoamericana de Arqueología Subacuática* (Latin American Underwater Archaeology Organization); its goals are to establish a regional network of professional support and to work toward the adoption and implementation of the 2001 UNESCO Convention throughout the region. Matthew Russell, chair of the Advisory Council on Underwater Archaeology (ACUA), stated: “The international impact of INAH’s projects is due to Pilar’s practice of including students and scholars from across both Latin and North America in her research projects. This practice of promoting international cooperation has resulted in a coherent network of colleagues and collaborators spanning the western hemisphere.”

Soon after becoming a vice-directorate in 1995, three major research projects were initiated: the 1630–1631 New Spain fleet research project; the Inventory and Diagnosis of Submerged Cultural Resources in the Gulf of Mexico; and the Underwater Archaeological Atlas for recording, studying, and protecting cenotes (sinkholes) in the Yucatan Peninsula. In recent times, three new projects have been initiated: research into a Manila galleon in Baja California, in cooperation with researchers from the United States; survey of two lagoons in the crater of the Nevado de Toluca volcano and its surroundings; and survey and recording of UCH at the Banco Chinchorro Biosphere Reserve in Quintana Roo, in conjunction with the official agency in charge of the natural patrimony, and further seeking its nomination as a World Heritage Site on the basis of natural and cultural criteria.

In 2003, the Underwater Archaeology Vice-Directorate initiated five special programs: (1) attention to public reports of cultural material findings, (2) dissemination of information about UCH, (3) training, (4) conservation of archaeological material recovered from submerged sites, and (5) agreements for national and international collaboration.

Perhaps as a result of growing respect in Mexican archaeological and scientific circles for Pilar’s perseverance and success in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, she has received accolades from INAH and her colleagues in Mexico. She has expanded her influence by actively consulting with other Central and South American nations, offering advice on how to establish programs to protect their submerged cultural resources. Dolores Elkin, director of the Underwater Archaeology Program in Argentina’s National Institute of Anthropology, remarked in support of Pilar for this award:

I first met Pilar Luna in Montevideo in 1994, when she was invited to lecture on underwater cultural heritage in the context of Uruguay’s national archaeology conference. At that time there were virtually no maritime archaeologists in South America, so for many people, like myself, meeting Pilar became the first opportunity to have direct contact with someone who was actually doing underwater archaeology in Latin America. I was instantly impressed by this woman who was a pioneer in such a male-dominated environment as our region is, particularly in activities related with diving.

Pilar’s presence in Uruguay was also crucial for its impact on the general public: At that time the country’s waters were being looted by treasure hunters, and Pilar’s lectures, talks and mass media interviews allowed people to hear a totally different message with regard to sunken ships. Her contribution to Uruguay’s public awareness on the protection of underwater cultural heritage was an extension of her struggle in her own country, Mexico, where she was fighting against various international salvage companies.

Pilar’s model was sufficient enough for me to decide to become involved in maritime archaeology and to try to follow her steps by learning to dive and by putting together a team which in due time could become capable of studying and protecting the underwater cultural heritage. In those first and not so easy years Pilar was a permanent source of encouragement and assistance: she sent people from her team to train us in underwater archaeological techniques here in Argentina, and she also invited members of our team to participate in maritime archaeology courses and fieldwork in Mexico.

Fifteen years down the road it is therefore fair to say that, directly or indirectly, the achievements of the Argentinean Underwater Archaeology Program at the National Institute of Anthropology are, in many ways, thanks to Pilar Luna.

Pilar’s contribution to maritime archaeology in Latin America continues to take place through courses and other initiatives aimed at young archaeologists from various countries of the region.

Dolores Elkin is not the only woman to take inspiration from Pilar's example. Mark Staniforth, associate professor in the Maritime Archaeology Program at Flinders University in Australia, noted in his letter of support that "Pilar has been an important role model for the involvement of women in underwater archaeology, which is still a male-dominated area within historical archaeology. She has been generous in her support of and assistance to both colleagues and students ... and has created a lasting legacy."

Pilar led the Underwater Archaeology Vice-Directorate in increased participation in international forums held by organizations such as the SHA, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), UNESCO, and the World Archaeological Congress. She is chair of the Underwater Archaeology Scientific Committee for ICOMOS Mexico, and one of the four international advisors for the National Geographic Society. A member of the ACUA since 1982, she is now an emeritus member. She has served on the ICOMOS International Committee on Underwater Cultural Heritage (ICUCH) since 1992, the Ships of Discovery Board of Directors since 1989, and the Waitt Institute for Discovery Advisory Committee since 2006. Pilar first attended an SHA conference in 1980, has continued to participate in subsequent conferences, and today serves on the SHA UNESCO Committee. Paul Johnston, curator of maritime history at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, summed it up when he wrote in support of Pilar's nomination that "she has been one of the strongest and most tireless international advocates of the preservation ethic in the area of underwater cultural heritage."

Pilar served on the Mexican delegation during development of the 2001 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage. She was instrumental in Mexico's ratification of the convention on 5 July 2006. She continues to represent Mexico at the ongoing UNESCO States Parties Meetings on the 2001 convention, and served as vice-chairperson of the first meeting of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Body to the UNESCO States Parties, held in Cartagena, Spain, from 13 to 15 June 2010. In her letter of support for Pilar for the J. C. Harrington Medal, Lyndel V. Prott, former director of the Cultural Heritage Division of UNESCO wrote:

I first became acquainted with Ms. Luna during preparations in the early 1990s for the negotiation of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage 2001. At that time she impressed with her great experience and her insistence on the high standards required in underwater archaeology.

During the negotiations, she was one of the most active and influential figures. She often represented the interests of the Latin American States and she was a most knowledgeable source of information for those not experienced in underwater cultural heritage matters or in the administration of protective rules. She also proved to have considerable diplomatic skills, being able to persuade with both arguments and humour, and she showed considerable patience with those not familiar with the complexities of underwater archaeology, the law of the sea, and the diversity of national systems of maritime law.

I believe it is fair to say that, without her participation, the text of the Convention as adopted would not appear as it now does.

Pilar has presented numerous lectures, written articles, and given interviews in radio, television, and the popular press in an effort to create a national and international consciousness regarding the importance of submerged cultural patrimony in Mexico and beyond. These activities have included the scientific community, diving groups, fishermen, and the public. In supporting Pilar's nomination, Francisco Alves, head of Portugal's Nautical and Underwater Archaeology Branch, expressed his "admiration of her professional, scientific and leadership skills, her tremendous human personality, and her talent as an engaging and clear communicator." Pilar's most recent book (coedited with Margaret Leshikar-Denton), detailing aspects of the Mexican experience and more, is *Underwater and Maritime Archaeology in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Left Coast Press 2008). It was inspired by a symposium on the subject that was held at the Fifth World Archaeological Congress (WAC-5) held in Washington, D.C., in 2003. Lyndel Prott particularly commended the work:

This book has long been needed and is a very valuable demonstration of the variety and significance of the underwater heritage of this region. Its appearance contributes to the understanding and the debate on ratification of the

2001 Convention at a time when many States are working towards its acceptance. As such, it continues Ms Luna's significant contribution to the international protection of the underwater cultural heritage.

I believe that her work on the Convention will be seen to be of considerable historic significance, this Convention being the first universally applicable on this subject.

In support of Pilar, Robert Grenier, former chief of underwater archaeology at Parks Canada and past-president of ICOMOS ICUCH wrote of her innate wisdom:

I often had to rely on advice from respected colleagues in periods of crisis. None could equal Pilar as my most reliable advisor: her incredible judgement, her overall vision, her well balanced sense of values and her indefatigable rigor made her advice irreplaceable. No wonder that she could successfully face adversity in such a macho world from her own managers, powerful admirals, treasure hunters, colleagues and even her own team members. This reputation of successful continuity in her achievements against all odds raised her profile and helped her build this solid national team, and influence the development of UCH protection in the hemisphere and all over the Hispanic world.

Matthew Russell expresses the sentiments of many of Pilar's colleagues in highlighting that "through her international activities, Pilar serves as a powerful example of how a single, committed individual can influence national policies and steer a nation towards a preservation ethic. In this, she is a role model internationally for colleagues across the globe, who strive to protect archaeological sites underwater."

In spite of physical ailments, including a near-fatal bout with histoplasmosis acquired during a cave excavation in the Yucatán, and a back injury that occurred during the abandonment of a sinking ship, Pilar has succeeded because of her respectful, articulate, and professional manner, leading the way for a new generation of underwater archaeologists. Maybe one of her best qualities is her kindness and warm way of being with people and with life in general. Her favorite quote is from the Spanish poet Antonio Machado: "Walker, there is no road. You make the road while you walk." So it is with Pilar, whose hard-won legacy has opened the way in Mexico. The SHA proudly presents Pilar Luna Erreguerena with the J. C. Harrington Medal in Historical Archaeology.

MARGARET E. LESHIKAR-DENTON AND TONI L. CARRELL