New Graduate Students, 2024–2025

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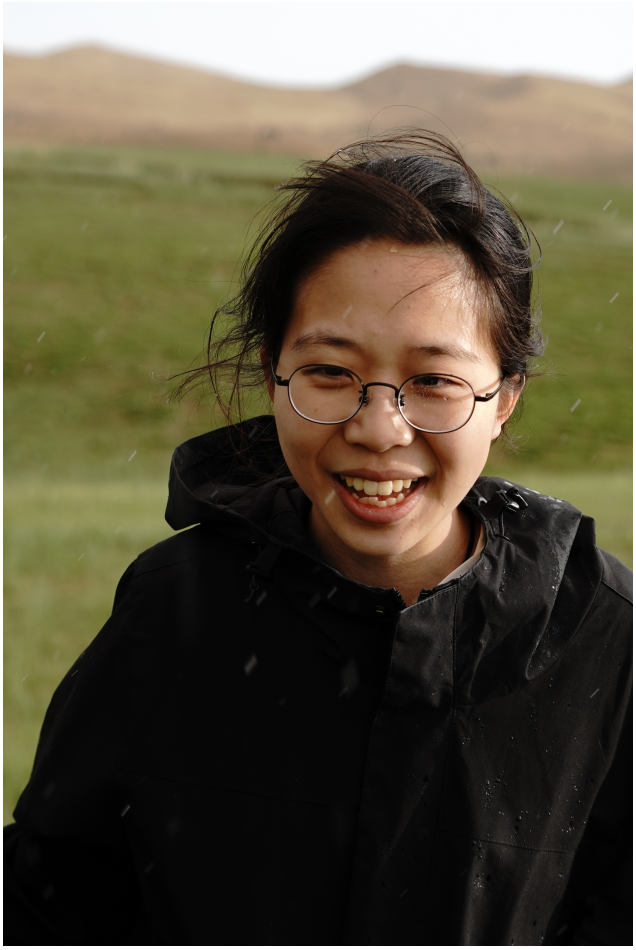
New Graduate Students, 2024–2025

WENYI ZHAO



Wenyi Zhao (Θ Ĺ) is pursuing her MA and PhD degrees in the Archaeology IDP at UCLA, with a focus on the archaeology of early China. She received her BA in history and a certificate in classical Chinese philology from Yuanpei College, Peking University, in 2024. Her training is interdisciplinary, encompassing early Chinese history, paleography, philology, and archaeology. Since 2022, she has participated in multiple archaeological excavations and surveys in southern Shanxi and northern Shaanxi in China, as well as a geological survey in northwestern China. Her current research focuses on socially marginal populations in early China, including human sacrifices, human retainers, enslaved individuals, and convicts, as well as the development of state penal and forced labor systems and practices of state violence.

TALIA NEELIS



Talia Neelis is pursuing a PhD at the Cotsen with a focus in prehistoric Cypriot archaeology. In 2025, Talia earned a BA in ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern studies with a minor in art history from the University of British Columbia, where she was awarded the Governor General's Silver Medal. She is interested in craftwork as a relational process across regions, landscapes, and social networks during the third and second millenniums BCE. Her involvement in the Kalavasos and Maroni Built Environments Project (UBC, Cornell) and the Kissonerga-Skalia Excavation (CAARI, HARP) on Cyprus and in the Eastern Boeotia Archaeological Project (UVic, Wellesley College) inspired her to pursue an interdisciplinary research focus. Talia explores culturally specific crafting knowledge through materiality-centered frameworks, feminist epistemologies, and archaeometric methodologies that center ontological relationships between humans and earthly matter. This research combines ceramic analysis with applications of GIS. Her undergraduate thesis studied the semiotic and phenomenological properties of gender representation in Late Bronze Age Cypriot figurines. Talia hopes to continue to explore how gender archaeology and post-humanist theory can be materially grounded in archaeological research. At UCLA, she will continue to study the Cypriot record while expanding her geographic focus across the eastern Mediterranean.