



President's Report
ASOR Board of Trustees
November 19, 2017

Thirty years ago, I left Harvard, where I had earned both a Master's degree and a Ph.D., to start my first teaching job, in a small town in South Carolina. I had at that point been in Cambridge for seven years, and I had good friends and a good life there. Conversely, I knew no one in South Carolina, and I had my doubts about trading my home in the cosmopolitan Boston catchment to live in the rural south. It was stressful, and in effort to help me come to terms with that stress, a well-meaning friend gave me an article from some pop psychology publication that proclaimed that after death of a family member and divorce, moving was the third-most stressful activity one could go through in life.

Thirty years later, having watched many people for whom I care deeply suffer through the deaths of loved ones or through divorce, I'm not so sure moving is really in the same league. But moving is still hard, and there is no doubt that the need to move our offices has made this a hard year for ASOR. Although we had, of course, known (and reported to the Board) that in August 2016 Boston University had put the building at 656 Beacon Street where our offices had housed for twenty years up for sale, and that the building, along with eight other Boston University buildings, had been purchased by a real estate developer in October 2016, the notice we received to vacate our offices on March 16, 2017, with a vacate date of May 31, 2017, came out of the blue and left us scrambling.

The Board will remember that when we last met, in April 2017, we had identified temporary spaces in Boston to rent very near our old office (at 650 and 665 Beacon Street), but securing the leases for these spaces also turned out to be something on a scramble -- so much so that we only received the final lease for 650 Beacon (which is currently housing ASOR's core staff) on Friday afternoon, May 26, 2017, four days before our "move-in" date of Tuesday, May 30, 2017. And that lease had a big surprise: a duration only through December 2017 (instead of December 2018, which we had expected and which is the end

date of the lease for the space at 665 Beacon). It was Memorial Day weekend, moreover -- so there was no chance of trying to get the lease revised on Monday before we moved on Tuesday. More stress.

But even in the midst of all this stress, a lot of good things were happening. First and foremost, ASOR's staff put in hours and hours of hard work in April and May to get us ready to move, and we moved with relative ease on May 30, 2017. To be sure, the elevator broke part way through the move (after having already been broken from late January through early May), and this caused some delays (remember, our 656 Beacon Street offices were on the 5th floor!), but after a thirteen-hour day, we were more or less out of 656 Beacon by the evening of May 30.

A second good thing: the New Office Committee, headed by our Board Chair Richard Coffman and comprised of five other Trustees (Joe Greene, Michael Hasel, Randy Helm, Sue Laden, and B.W. Ruffner) had been hard at work since late in 2016 and had developed for us an excellent "Request for Proposals" that detailed what ASOR sought in terms of new office space, including both pragmatic specifications (the size and nature of the facility we need) and an articulation of our desire to continue, if possible, the kind of institutional affiliation we had with BU. This helped immensely in telling us what to look for in terms of new office space, and where to look.

It also turns out that all those networks one develops over a career matter, and members of the New Office Committee, other Board members, other ASOR volunteers, our Executive Director, and I all mobilized our networks to try to identify possible new homes for ASOR. We continued to maintain that remaining in Boston would be a plus, and our Executive Director's networks, in particular, have brought us into communication with two Boston possibilities, although there is no concrete, or even semi-concrete, offer from either.

Moreover, as I wrote to the Board on June 6, 2017, we had reached a point where almost everything -- including possibilities outside Boston -- needed to be on the table. As we will report at the Board meeting and as we intend to discuss with the Board in some detail, we have secured one concrete proposal and one "hopeful" proposal from two academic partners, the University of New Hampshire and George Washington University. The specifics of these proposals (in as much detail as we currently have) will be provided to the Board, and we are also prepared to discuss with the Board the possibility of remaining in Boston and foregoing an academic affiliation and space on a university campus. In this scenario, we would need to purchase an office or expect to pay \$40+ per square foot per year in rent (meaning at least between \$60,000 and \$80,000 per year, depending on how much space we required).

In our meeting, we will be asking the Board to direct us in how to move forward. In

anticipation of this discussion, let me just say that while I do not mean in any way to preempt the Board's discussion or unduly influence its deliberations, I believe strongly that all these proposals, although they are different and offer different advantages and opportunities, are viable and, in many respects, good possibilities for ASOR. Which is to say: we have *good* choices available to us. And we also have a little breathing room: our Executive Director has been able to get us an extension on our lease at 650 Beacon Street that runs until June 2018. Furthermore, and as will be detailed in the Treasurer's Report, the fact that we ended FY 2017 with a surplus for operations of about \$73,277 -- and that we have ended with a surplus for the past several years -- means we have money in the bank to help support the expense of moving and other expenses that may come with a new home.

In short: it's been hard, and it's been stressful, and there are surely more hardships and more stress to come. But because of the good work already undertaken, by our staff, our New Office Committee, our Board, other ASOR volunteers, and our Executive Director, I am certain that we will have a new home -- and a *good* new home -- come July 1, 2018.

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While the issue of ASOR's new home has undoubtedly been a major item of business for me, our Executive Director, and others on our staff and on our Board, there have been some other things going on at ASOR -- and many quite good things.

The Annual Meeting. As I reported to the Board in my April 2017 President's Report, we received nearly 700 abstract submissions for the 2017 Annual Meeting program, as opposed to 540 abstract submissions for 2016. To be sure, not all those proposed papers ended up on the program -- sometimes because of choices we made, sometimes because potential presenters withdrew -- but we have ended up with 608 papers to be presented at the Annual Meeting, across 119 sessions (normally at the Annual Meeting, there are 96 sessions). There will also be 74 poster presentations (as opposed to 38 in 2016).

This is an astounding increase. We think that "location, location, location" (Boston) must be an important factor: note, for example, that like us (see further below), the SBL (which, of course, is also meeting in Boston, in the same week as the ASOR meeting) is reporting they will have a record number of attendees. Still, as I reported to the Board in April, SBL also had a 10% *decrease* in paper proposals received. So there is something more than "location, location, location" going on. We have heard anecdotally that paper presenters may appreciate the longer time blocks allocated for papers at the ASOR meeting (twenty to twenty-five minutes) as opposed to the time allotted at meetings of some other learned societies (the SAA allots only twelve minutes per paper). We also hope, of course, that the increase in interest in the ASOR meeting is our growing reputation for "conduct[ing] an exceptional professional meeting dedicated to scholarship on the history and cultures of

the Near East and the wider Mediterranean world" (Goal #1 in the ASOR 2016-2020 Strategic Plan).

That said, the ASOR 2016-2020 Strategic Plan also articulates as a goal that "the current number of paper-presentation sessions (approximately 96 sessions over the course of a three-day meeting) should remain roughly as is (i) to preserve the intimacy of the meeting, and (ii) to allow meeting participants to attend most (or all) of their desired sessions, with minimal scheduling conflicts." The Programs Committee has taken this charge very seriously, and so (at least currently) sees the decision it made for 2017, to expand the number of sessions from 96 to 119, as a one-time only "fix." Going forward, the Programs Committee believes they may need to become more selective about papers accepted for presentation at the Annual Meeting, and they are considering ways to signal this in the 2018 "Call for Papers," so that potential presenters are aware from the start that their papers may not be as readily accepted as in past years.

Still, as the Programs Committee has commented, this is really a great problem to have: to enhance the quality of what is apparently our increasingly popular meeting by becoming more selective. Note, moreover, that hosting increasingly popular meeting can help us meet a third goal regarding the Annual Meeting that we set for ourselves in the ASOR 2016-2020 Strategic Plan: increasing Annual Meeting revenue (especially given that the Annual Meeting is not financially self-sustaining) by growing Annual Meeting attendance. We have certainly done that this year: as of November 12, 2017, we had 1106 people registered for the Annual Meeting, as opposed to 881 attendees at the 2016 meeting in San Antonio.

The New Website. On June 13, 2017, we went "live" with ASOR's new website, at www.asor.org. I hope you all are happy with -- and, indeed, proud of -- the way it represents our organization: I know I am. I am particularly pleased with the way our staff has kept the home page fresh and up-to-date. We have changed the three pictures in the home page "slide show" once a month since we launched, and we have worked hard to be sure we feature images that come from the many different places in the Near East and wider Mediterranean where ASOR members work and from many different historical periods.

The staff has also been diligent about regularly updating the "news" bars that are below the slide show. The "Publications" bar changes monthly to focus on some new aspect of ASOR Publications. The "Annual Meeting" bar also changes monthly and especially tries to keep members aware of approaching deadlines for the meeting -- paper submission deadlines; registration deadlines; etc. The "ANE Today" bar changes weekly to feature that week's lead story in the *ANE Today* e-zine; since the *ANE Today* e-zine is our primary instrument for outreach, this means our home page always has something on it for non-members as well as members. Finally, there is an "ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives" bar which changes at least monthly, to highlight the reporting work on the cultural heritage crisis in the Middle

East (especially Syria, northern Iraq, and now Libya) that is being done by our CHI staff.

New Fellowships. One of the goals we articulated in our 2016-2020 Strategic Plan was our intent to complement the well-established and extremely successful fellowship and scholarship programs we have in place for students (fellowships that send undergraduate and graduate students to the Middle East to participate in fieldwork projects and scholarships that help students to attend the annual meeting) with a increased number of fellowships and grants that support ASOR academic members throughout their careers. I am pleased that in the last three years we have made significant progress toward this goal and continue to make progress, with the addition of two new fellowship endowments that will be announced at the Annual Meeting.

First, the Herbert Warren Mason Fellowship, *Retelling of Ancient and Medieval Myths and Legends of the Near East and Wider Mediterranean* (including oral transmissions), has been established in memory of Herbert W. Mason (1932 - 2017). Herbert Mason was a distinguished and prolific scholar, translator, writer, and poet, known for his translations and retellings of the Mesopotamian Epic of Gilgamesh, of two classic Persian tales, *A Legend of Alexander* and *The Merchant and the Parrot*, and of the tenth-century Muslim account of *The Death of al-Hallaj*. The Mason Fellowship will award \$5000 biennially to a scholar/poet/writer whose project proposal comes closest in scope to Herbert Mason's oeuvre and may be used to support travel expenditures to special collections, acquire access to rare or hard to find research materials, and further scholarly studies.

The ASOR Lawrence T. Geraty Community Archaeology Endowment aims to heighten awareness of the damage that has been done to archaeological sites throughout Jordan and facilitate the participation of local communities in taking care of heritage sites in their backyards. To this end, earnings from the endowment will fund community-initiated projects that develop local capacity to care for and present archaeological sites. The endowment will also serve as a model and demonstration of ways that archaeologists might partner with local communities for their mutual benefit.

Also this year, the Joe Seger Excavation Fellowship, which was established in 2015 in order to offer support to directors of fieldwork projects (for example, to purchase a special piece of equipment, to pay the fees for otherwise unfunded laboratory tests, or to cover the cost of hiring a particular specialist), will be awarded for the first time, and we are in the process of securing another \$2500 excavation grant to support fieldwork projects, which, like the new Seger fund, would be available in Summer 2018. Furthermore, in Summer 2018, we will award for the fourth time the William G. Dever Fellowship for Biblical Scholars, a \$7,000 grant to a qualified American untenured faculty member in the field of biblical studies who wants to acquire elementary, first-hand experience in field archaeology and research in Israel. Finally, we will again award -- as we did last year, for the first time -- at least two Study of Collection Fellowships, \$2000 grants to support ASOR members'

expenses in traveling and working in museum and archival collections, repositories, or collections of national authorities.

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November is always a time when we as a Board say goodbye to members who are ending their term of service on our Board. In particular, I want to say goodbye and express my gratitude to Rami Arav, who is leaving our Board after serving as a Membership-elected Trustee, and Christopher White, whose term as our Treasurer has ended. We will miss you both.