

ASOR ARS

Renewal of three-year editorial term – Statement of Purpose and Goals Kevin M. McGeough

Goals/direction of the past three years:

I am writing to propose that I continue as ARS editor for another three-year term. So far, I have found the experience to be personally and academically rewarding and I believe that I have helped a number of authors (at differing stages of their manuscript) move closer to publishing their reports. In some ways, I have spent the last two and a half years getting used to the processes of editing the series and seeing through to completion the projects that were still ongoing from my predecessor's term. Beyond maintaining the high editorial standards set for the series by Joe Greene, I have attempted to broaden the geographical and temporal scope of reports published within the series, to reflect the diversity of ASOR's mandate. To that end I have been successful, at least at the preliminary level, since under my editorship proposals for reports on Dilmun and Byzantine-Medieval Cyprus have been accepted. I have also worked to encourage junior faculty to submit proposals, which has met with success. By the end of my first three-year term, there will have been three volumes published in ARS (Iskandar, Humayma, and the ARNAS survey) and a number of other volumes at different stages of completion.

Plans for the next three years:

Continuing as editor would allow me the opportunity, now that I am comfortable in this role, of taking the series in some new directions and addressing some current issues. Significant unresolved issues I have discussed with various members of COP over the past two years include subvention and databases.

Subvention: For the most part, I have not encountered too many problems with the subvention for well-established projects or in regards to submissions from more senior scholars and I think that the \$5000 rate is appropriate. However, for junior scholars, funding can be a problem since there is a greater degree of time sensitivity for publication, due to career progress issues (i.e., job applications and tenure applications). I currently have one proposal that falls into this category. While it is true that a subvention grant from an independent funding agency will strengthen the junior scholar's c.v., it also means a greater lag time in terms of publishing the materials. Part of this may be alleviated by bringing back ASOR's dissertation publication series, funded through the Opportunity Fund (or other funds), as suggested at the last COP meeting. Some of the junior publications may fit well with that series. However, members of COP have indicated that there were problems with this series in the past and it may not be the right choice to bring this series back. Rather, it may be possible to establish a fund or infrastructure that junior scholars can draw from through ASOR (using the Opportunity Fund or outside sources) to defray some of the costs of publication. If a fund is established that

junior scholars can use to subvent their publication, it is important that fixed criteria are established to guarantee that each applicant is treated the same way. It may also be useful to have outside adjudicates determine the eligibility of individual applicants. Of course, any ASOR based initiative is dependent on ASOR's financial state at a given moment, but these may be solutions to work towards. If possible, we should move towards eliminating the need for subventions for this series. However, it is important that this not be predicated on sales of individual volumes, as, to my mind, the point of this series is to provide a medium through which archaeological data can be published that is not dependent on commercial considerations.

Format of Databases: A real concern with current ARS publications is how to deal with the large databases which authors want to have supplement their printed publications. Our current practice is to allow supplementary CDs to be included with the books. These do not cost much to produce. However, there are significant problems with software universality and the general movement away from CDs as a technology. These databases contain useful content and I feel that we have an ethical obligation to make this information available as part of the publication strategy. However, since this kind of data is far more useful in digital form, we need to find an alternate, likely web-based means, of publishing this type of content.

The issue of databases should be dealt with in tandem with one of my major goals (if granted a three-year renewal) of moving to produce e-versions of ARS volumes. While working with the digital proofs of Humayma on my iPad, it became apparent to me that PDF versions of the books would be very useful. The ability to take ARS volumes into the field digitally, and the ability to manipulate the images, has great potential to increase the utility of ARS volumes. Over the next three years, I want to investigate different possibilities of producing e-versions. Ideally, it would be best to produce them in a format that is downloadable, as opposed to being hosted on a website. This would allow users to work with the books in the field (when internet connectivity is minimal and/or expensive). Members of COP have suggested that we investigate the OI's model of distributing e-versions of books free on the internet. It has been suggested that this has actually improved sales of hard copies of these same volumes. This is worth further consideration and may be the right choice for ARS.

The issue of circulation is also one that needs to be addressed. Part of the mandate of ARS, as I see it, is to publish reports that do not have strong commercial prospects but are important works regardless. Nevertheless, there is always work that can be done to address readership. At the last COP meeting, we began the first stages of addressing these issues by establishing a procedure to better target potential reviewing journals. Given the diversity of topics covered in ARS, I want to start targeting scholarly communities outside of ASOR that may be interested in these works and make sure, for example, that Classicists know about Oleson's Humayma volume. Related, I think that we can do more to encourage ASOR members to purchase ARS volumes. In an informal meeting in New Orleans, Mitch Allen suggested to me that we could offer a pre-order discount to ASOR members to

encourage sales. Another suggestion was that we distribute ARS volumes as part of an institutional membership package. These are suggestions that need to be considered in tandem with sales data from our distributor to make sure that these ventures would not just undermine the sales that we already make for each volume.

Related to the issue of circulation is the issue of production, printing, and storage costs. These costs are considerable and may be alleviated by moving to a print on demand format for publication. In the past, the quality of this type of production has not been sufficient for ARS. However, as this technology continues to improve, we need to investigate it. I feel that this could greatly reduce ARS costs.

Finally, I would like to draw up (in communication with the AASOR and BASOR editors), a set of procedural instructions for contributors related to the process of submitting volumes and identifying which of these three publication venues is the appropriate location for publication. The process is already fairly standardized but these processes should be made more apparent online.

Additional resources or changes in process:

For the most part, I think that the process as it stands work well. However, in order to move forward with the various electronic publication issues that I have identified, it would be helpful to establish a smaller working group within COP composed of individuals who have experience with e-publications to draw up some preliminary recommendations to bring back to COP.

It would also be very helpful for me to have greater access to sales information from our distributor, in terms of identifying who buys ARS volumes. This information is critical for moving forward with new strategies for increasing circulation.

One suggestion that has been made by COP that I think would be of considerable help is to hire a professional copy editor to work through the manuscripts before submission to the publishers. This would alleviate some of the pressure on individual authors and the ARS editor and may, in the long run, actually save money in production costs.