

President's Report
ASOR Board of Trustees
November 23, 2014

Through our e-mail announcements, through *News@ASOR*, and from our web page, members of the ASOR Board of Trustees have surely (and repeatedly) heard of ASOR's two major accomplishments since the time of my last president's report (May 3, 2014): these are (1) the remarkably successful conclusion of our "Building a Foundation for ASOR" campaign, on June 30, 2014, and (2) the inauguration of ASOR's "Syrian Heritage Initiative: Planning for Safeguarding Heritage Sites in Syria," administered through a cooperative agreement that ASOR entered into with the United States Department of State on August 4, 2014. However, no matter how much Board members have heard about these two accomplishments already, the facts are so extraordinary that they bear repeating.

The Foundational Campaign. We began this campaign on July 1, 2011, with the goal of raising \$1,000,000 for projects like program endowment, research and training support, and online digital media resources—and, at the same time, to continue to bring in \$100,000 every year in annual fund donations. We gave ourselves three years—through June 30, 2014—to raise the \$1.3 million. Then we started biting our nails, pacing the floor, wringing our hands: \$1.3 million is a lot of money. Could we really do it?

The answer, we learned on June 30, 2014, was a resounding "yes," and then some, as our final campaign total came in at \$1,702,000—\$402,000, or a little over 30%, above our original campaign goal. Equally gratifying was the fact that in every year of the campaign, we raised more than the year before, and in every year, more donors gave: 282 donors in the campaign's first year; 353 donors in the year following, and a whopping 417 donors in the campaign's third and final year. This means that by the end of the campaign, roughly 25% of the ASOR membership was making a charitable contribution to ASOR. This year, at our annual meeting, we have marked those members' name badges with a special "Donor" icon, and it is extremely gratifying to me to think of walking the halls of the Westin San Diego and seeing those specially marked name badges with every step. It's also extremely gratifying to me to think of seeing those specially marked name badges around every one of our Board members' necks, and among the many, many thanks we owe to so many people for the Foundational Campaign's success, a huge thanks goes to our Board for their commitment to the Campaign and for their 100% participation. Your leadership made a huge difference in persuading others to step forward and give.

Others to whom we owe a huge thanks include the leadership of our Campaign Cabinet, P. E. MacAllister, the Honorary Campaign Chair and Chair Emeritus of the ASOR Board of Trustees, and Robert A. Oden, Jr., the Campaign Chair and member of the ASOR Board. ASOR's Past President, Timothy P. Harrison, who led ASOR for thirty of the campaign's thirty-six months, also did an amazing job of shepherding our fund-raising efforts, as did the ASOR Executive Director, Andrew G. Vaughn. Finally, let me thank

the rest of the campaign cabinet: Vivian Bull, Sheldon Fox, and Eric M. Meyers. All of us at ASOR are the beneficiaries of these individuals' hard and diligent work.

In terms of the Foundational Campaign's successes, I'd particularly like to highlight our accomplishments in meeting our Campaign Challenges #2 and #3: "Research and Training Support" and "Online Digital Media Resources." With regard to the former, "Research and Training Support," we have been able to increase dramatically the number of field excavation grants we award to students: from 42 in 2012, to 55 in 2013, to 59 in 2014. We anticipate, moreover, that these numbers will increase again in 2015 and especially 2016, when we anticipate first awarding funds from two recently established scholarship funds: the "Strange and Midkiff Families Endowed Scholarship Fund" and the "Carol and Eric Meyers Endowed Scholarship Fund." For our Board, moreover, it should be a point of particular pride that these two funds honor some of our most long-serving and venerable Board members: Jim Strange, Eric Meyers, and Carol Meyers. We have also been able to honor our long-serving and venerable Board colleague P.E. MacAllister with the establishment of the "P. E. MacAllister Endowed Scholarship Fund," which has been fully funded and is already being used for scholarship support.

With regard to Campaign Challenge #3, "Online Digital Media Resources," our campaign success has allowed us to launch our *News@ASOR* e-newsletter, which we first published almost two full years ago, on January 18, 2013, as well as our other new online publication, *The ANE Today* (which began publication on April 9, 2013). In addition, ASORtv went live about a year ago, and our Archives collections—and especially their online access—have also been expanded and enhanced. *The ANE Today* and ASORtv, moreover, are key components of our "Friends at ASOR" program, an outreach effort to bring archaeological and historical research in the eastern Mediterranean to anyone interested. Right now, "Friends at ASOR" has close to 9000 members.

Still, it's worth noting that we haven't yet been able to do everything with the "Friends at ASOR" program that we would like: for example, "The Friends of ASOR Resource Page," a promised "perk" of the "Friends at ASOR" program, is still under development. More important, we'd like to have more "Friends," and we'd also like to develop some profit-generating outreach initiatives that would allow the program to be self-sustaining. So far, our only move in that direction—the Webinar series that the Board approved at our April 2013 meeting—failed to attract the response for which we had hoped (a matter concerning which the Executive Committee received a report in September 2014).

It's equally worth noting, to return to Campaign Challenge #2, "Research and Training Support," that while the Foundational Campaign was enormously successful in raising funds to send students into the field to participate in archaeological excavations, we were not able to raise funds comparable to our current Harris grants, which help support excavators' field projects (by helping newer and smaller projects get started; by funding discrete and relatively modest components of larger projects; and by supporting off-season research, analysis, and publications). Yet this sort of funding is something our members tell us they really want. Likewise, we were not particularly successful regarding Campaign Challenge #1, "Program Endowment Support."

None of this should necessarily come as a surprise: as development professionals at academic institutions will attest, the easiest money to raise is for student scholarships and for new and “hip” initiatives (like our outreach initiatives and our enhanced online presence). Nevertheless, as we look toward fund-raising in the future, we will need to focus particularly on efforts to bring in monies for things like our endowment and our excavation support grants that remain under-funded.

The Syrian Heritage Initiative. Board of Trustee members will remember that we reported to them, at our May 3, 2014, meeting that ASOR had applied for a grant of \$600,000 that would have us enter into a one-year cooperative agreement with the US Department of State to undertake planning for safeguarding heritage sites in Syria. Board of Trustee members will also remember that we were not necessarily optimistic about our chances, as we knew there were other organizations applying for this grant that had far more experience in grantsmanship than we did. When the anticipated notification date (May 15, 2014) came and went, we felt less optimistic still. Nevertheless, we felt that even the process of applying was of value, so that we could gain some experience that would benefit us the next time, and the time thereafter, and after that, when we applied for similarly funded projects.

Imagine our surprise, then, when we learned on May 30 that we had been chosen as the successful awardee to enter into a cooperative agreement with the State Department for work on Syria. The next two months then became devoted to getting all the “i”s dotted and “t”s crossed, but by August 4, 2014, all this was done, and we officially announced the beginning of ASOR’s “Syrian Heritage Initiative: Planning for Safeguarding Heritage Sites in Syria.” The “Syrian Heritage Initiative” team is led by five co-directors/co-principal investigators: Scott Branting (ASOR), Jesse Casana (University of Arkansas), Michael Danti (Boston University and ASOR), Abdal-Razzaq Moaz (Indiana University and ASOR), and Andrew Vaughn (ASOR). LeeAnn Barnes Gordon (ASOR) serves as Project Manager for Conservation and Heritage Preservation. More than thirty additional scholars and specialists serve as co-investigators, consultants, or advisors.

The Initiative’s goal is to plan for the safeguarding of heritage sites in Syria, including archaeological sites, museums and their collections, libraries, and archives. The Initiative has begun by working to document as comprehensively as possible the current condition of heritage sites in Syria, using sources as diverse as satellite imagery, social media, in-country informants, and expatriate cultural heritage specialists. The Initiative has also begun to identify some key cultural heritage projects, both small-scale mitigation projects and more large-scale preservation projects, that could be carried out in Syria, either immediately or in the future.

I won’t say much more, as the Board will have an opportunity to engage in substantive discussions about ASOR’s “Syrian Heritage Initiative” with the co-directors/co-principal investigators and other key members of the SHI team at the breakfast event with which our Board meeting of November 23, 2014, begins. The Board is also encouraged to participate in the Syrian Heritage Initiative Symposium that will take place at the Westin

San Diego Hotel on November 23, 2014, immediately after our Board meeting adjourns (Luncheon from 12:15 - 1:45 pm, in Crystal Ballroom 1; Project Summaries and Panel Discussion, 2:00 - 5:00 pm, in Crystal Ballroom 2; more information at <http://www.asor.org/news/2014/10/shi-symposium.html>). I would also encourage the Board to visit the “Syrian Heritage Initiative” web page (<http://www.asor-syrianheritage.org/>) and especially to read the extremely impressive reports posted there that we deliver weekly to the Department of State.

Indeed, the Department of State has been so impressed with our weekly reports, and with our work generally, that in September, ASOR was awarded an additional \$156,000 to extend our work of documenting the current condition of cultural heritage sites into the areas of Northern Iraq that are not currently under the control of the Baghdad government. I am extremely proud and extremely gratified that the Department of State has recognized all that both the Syrian Heritage Initiative’s team members and ASOR as an organization have to offer. I am also proud of the part that our Syrian Heritage Initiative will play in fulfilling our mission to initiate, encourage and support research into, and public understanding of, the cultures and history of the Near East.

The Cultural Heritage Committee. The inauguration of ASOR’s “Syrian Heritage Initiative,” in conjunction with the assaults on cultural heritage (e.g., looting) that are taking place in many other parts of the Near East and eastern Mediterranean, convinced me last spring that ASOR needed a committee to address some of these issues. I consulted with the Chairs Coordinating Council about this idea at our May 17-18, 2014, retreat, and with their approval, I moved to establish the Cultural Heritage Committee. I am extremely pleased that Professor Sturt Manning, from Cornell University, has agreed to chair this committee: the other members are Jane Evans, Morag Kersel, Brain Rose, Sarah Parcak, and Chris Tuttle. Among these members, Morag Kersel has accepted the responsibility to serve as liaison between ASOR’s Cultural Heritage Committee and the relatively new AIA Cultural Heritage Policy Committee (on which she sits).

The charge I gave to ASOR’s Cultural Heritage Committee is four-fold:

- First, the committee has *reactive* responsibilities: to advise the president, and ASOR’s leadership more generally, on how to react when presented with the sort of request from, say, the AIA that I received in May: that ASOR sign an AIA-initiated letter to the Cultural Property Advisory Committee of the Department of State, in support of a Memorandum of Understanding between the United States and the Arab Republic of Egypt that would impose import restrictions on artistic and archaeological material from Egypt.
- Second, the committee has *proactive* responsibilities: to suggest to the president, and ASOR’s leadership more generally, ways and means by which ASOR might intervene to help safeguard the cultural heritage of the Near East. It could be the committee’s responsibility, for example, to bring to the attention of the president, and ASOR’s leadership more generally, funding opportunities such as the “Planning for Safeguarding Heritage Sites in Syria” State

Department grant.

- Third, the committee has *interactive* responsibilities: to interact with, say, the AIA Cultural Heritage Policy Committee and the SAA International Government Affairs Committee in formulating proposed policy positions or responses to various cultural heritage issues that ASOR, the AIA, the SAA, and the AAA may jointly wish to champion.

- Fourth, the committee serves as the official oversight body in ASOR of ASOR-led cultural heritage initiatives, such as our Syrian Heritage Initiative. This does not mean, let me be clear, that I mean for the committee to manage, much less micro-manage, such initiatives, but the committee is asked to assess the place of various ASOR cultural heritage initiatives in the context of ASOR's overall work and mission and make sure that whatever cultural heritage work we undertake is in service of our members, is consistent with our commitment to our members' needs and interests, and does not detract from the many other ways we try to serve the ASOR membership.

Right now, I understand this committee to be one of *ad hoc* status, established through the President's prerogative to form *ad hoc* committees. My intention is to let the Cultural Heritage Committee percolate along for a year, a year and a half, or two on this *ad hoc* basis and see how things are going. Then, if things are going well and if the Committee is performing a valuable function, I plan to propose to the Board that we emend the by-laws to make it a regular standing committee of ASOR.

The Strategic Planning Task Force. As I have previously indicated to the Board, it is my intention to put into place a Strategic Planning Task Force, whose charge would be to build on the existing ASOR Strategic Plan (for 2011-2015) in order to develop the Plan's next iteration, for 2016-2020. My goal is for this task force to do its work through the end of 2014 and the first part of 2015, in order to present a draft version of its intentions to the Board next April and then a final version, for ratification, in November 2015. I have begun issuing invitations to serve on this Task Force, and so far, I can announce that it will have the following members: Susan Ackerman (Chair), B.W. Ruffner, Vivian Bull, Sharon Herbert, J. Edward Wright, and Frederick A. Winter. Three other invitations are currently outstanding, and I hope to hear from each shortly. It is also my intention to convene the Task Force members who are available for at least an informal gathering in San Diego.

Members of our Board of Trustees. November is always a time when we as a Board say goodbye to members who are ending their term of service on our Board and when we welcome new members, both individual and institutional members who are elected at the Members' meeting that takes place during the annual meeting and Board-designated members that we as a Board elect to our ranks. We will have an opportunity to issue words of welcome to our new members at our November 23 Board meeting, after the members' and Board elections have taken place, but in addition to the goodbyes we will say then to six outgoing members, I want to recognize and express my gratitude for their

service here. So, goodbyes and thanks to individual members Laura Mazow and Beth Alpert Nakhai; to institutional member Gary Arbino; and to Board-designated trustees Stevan Dana, Robert Massie, and Orlyn Nelson. All of these individuals have rendered tremendous services to the Board: by giving generously of their expertise and wisdom; through their work on various Board committees; through magnanimous donations and other gifts in kind; and because of their friendship and good cheer. We will miss them all.