

**President's Report**  
**ASOR Board of Trustees**  
**November 22, 2015**

My President's Reports to the ASOR Board may seem, at times, to sound a one-note symphony, for, indeed, it has been my privilege to sound basically the same note over and over: ASOR is thriving! For example, as the Board will hear in the Treasurer's Report, ASOR is thriving financially. Below, I highlight some other aspects of ASOR's major accomplishments and initiatives since the Board last met.

**(1) Strategic Planning**

The current ASOR Strategic Plan has guided ASOR well during last five years: 2011-2015. In order to update it with a Strategic Plan for the next five-year period, from 2016-2020, I established a Strategic Planning Task Force last fall, just before the 2014 Annual Meeting. The members of that Task Force are Susan Ackerman (Chair), Gary Arbino, Vivian Bull, Richard Coffman, Sharon Herbert, Øystein LaBianca, Heather Parker, B. W. Ruffner, Frederick Winter, and J. Edward Wright. These Task Force members have been more than generous with their time and their wisdom, and I cannot thank them enough for all they have done to contribute to the Strategic Planning process.

In the past year, the Task Force has convened for face-to-face meetings three times, with another meeting scheduled for the 2015 Annual Meeting, and we have communicated frequently via e-mail. We have developed successive iterations of, first, a working document and then a draft Strategic Plan, which we shared with the ASOR Board of Trustees at its April 2014 meeting, the ASOR Executive Committee at its October 2015 meeting, and the ASOR Chairs Coordinating Council, in its May, October, and November 2015 conference calls. Most recently, we have asked the Chairs of our various committees to share the parts of the draft that most pertain to their committees' mandates with their committee members for discussion, ideally at the 2015 Annual Meeting, and we have circulated a draft to the entire ASOR membership for comment via the November 3, 2015, issue of *News@ASOR*: see <http://www.asor.org/news/2015/11/strategic-plan-new-draft.html>. The Board will also devote a part of its Sunday meeting in Atlanta to meeting with members of the Strategic Planning Task Force and discussing its reactions to the current draft.

The Task Force's plan is to engage in yet another round of revisions after the Atlanta meeting and to share that revised draft for comment with the entire ASOR membership early in the new year. Our hope is that the revisions that result from that early 2016 comment period will be the last. That is, it is our hope to finish with the comment and revising process by March 2016 and then bring the finalized plan to the Board of Trustees for a vote at the Board meetings in April 2016.

Because we will be devoting significant time to discussing the Strategic Plan at our Atlanta Board meeting, I will refrain from making much more comment here. I would only say that I think the draft Strategic Plan for 2016-2020 reflects an agenda for ASOR

that is ambitious in its aspirations, perhaps very ambitious, yet nevertheless I think the Plan's ambitions are something ASOR can realistically expect to achieve. To put the matter another way: I take seriously the maxim that "success breeds success," and the successes we have achieved in the past five years, guided by the 2011-2015 ASOR Strategic Plan, convince me that we are ready to build on those successes and do even more to serve our discipline and our members. It's that one-note symphony again: ASOR is thriving, and that positions us to reach even higher.

## **(2) ASOR's Cultural Heritage Initiatives**

One program at ASOR that is particularly thriving is our relatively new work in Cultural Heritage Initiatives – see <http://www.asor-syrianheritage.org/>. As the Board knows, we began this program in August 2014, when we signed a one-year cooperative agreement with the United States Department of State to monitor damage to cultural heritage sites in Syria, to increase global awareness about this damage, and to make recommendations regarding post-conflict restoration projects that might be undertaken. The funding for this initial cooperative agreement was for \$600,000, but a scant two months later, in October 2014, that amount increased to \$756,000, in order that we might expand our mandate to monitor damage to cultural heritage in the parts of northern Iraq that had fallen under ISIL's control. This September, we renewed our cooperative agreement for a second year, with \$900,000 in funding. We have also received support for our Cultural Heritage Initiatives work from the J. M. Kaplan Fund and in-kind support from the Getty Conservation Institute, The World Monuments Fund, and Arnold and Porter, LLC.

Moreover, in August, we learned that ASOR and the AIA had jointly been awarded a \$30,000 Chairman's Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, to help fund a two-day conference in Washington, D.C., on December 10-11, 2015. Our goal is for ASOR and the AIA to play a leadership role in bringing together different U.S.-based and international organizations that, like ASOR, are working on issues concerning cultural heritage in Syria and northern Iraq, to ask how we might encourage cooperation among these groups so that we might compliment (rather than needlessly duplicate) each other's work.

I am proud of the recognition that our work on cultural heritage degradation and destruction in Syria and northern Iraq is bringing ASOR. We were leaders, for example, in reporting ISIL's destruction of six tower tombs near Palmyra in early September (<http://dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1798>), and Michael Danti, the Academic Director of our Cultural Heritage Initiatives program, was interviewed on NPR's "All Things Considered" in late August (<http://www.npr.org/2015/08/31/436377457/archaeologist-works-to-track-the-islamic-states-war-on-culture>). Other members of the ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiative, LeeAnn Barnes Gordon and Abdulrazzaq Moaz, have been recently featured in reporting done by the BBC (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b067170m>; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-33984006>) and CNN (<http://edition.cnn.com/videos/world/2015/08/19/antiquities-expert-beheaded-intv-wrn.cnn>). Just before our meetings convene, moreover, on the afternoon of November 17,

Michael Danti is scheduled to testify before the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Trade on behalf of ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives.

I am also proud of the ways in which our work in Cultural Heritage Initiatives serves our members, especially by providing them with up-to-date and reliable information of what is happening in Syria, northern Iraq, and elsewhere. Particularly noteworthy in this regard is the most recent issue of *Near Eastern Archaeology*, guest-edited by Jesse Casana, the Cultural Heritage Initiative's Director for Site Databases and Remote Sensing, which contained a series of major articles on cultural heritage destruction not only in Syria and Iraq, but also Afghanistan, Egypt, and Libya. The Cultural Heritage Initiatives team has also produced several special reports on the destructions in Palmyra and at Nimrud (<http://www.asor-syrianheritage.org/special-reports/>), on top of the regular weekly reports they publish (<http://www.asor-syrianheritage.org/weekly-reports/>). And, of course, ASOR is sponsoring a free session, open to the general public, in Atlanta, which begins immediately after our Board meeting adjourns on November 22, 2015, to report on the current status of our work about cultural heritage in peril, as well as the work of others (<http://www.asor.org/news/2015/09/chi-symposium.html>).

That said, we aim to do more still. I was very pleased in this regard to be able to join with AIA President Andrew Moore in August, to issue a joint ASOR-AIA statement on the cultural heritage crisis in Yemen (<http://www.asor.org/news/2015/08/yemen.html>), and I also very pleased to report that the ASOR Cultural Heritage Committee, which I formed last year, intends to take up the question of a more proactive policy for ASOR at its meeting in Atlanta. We, moreover, invite the Board to join ASOR on April 18<sup>th</sup> (Monday), following our April 17, 2016, Board meeting in Washington D.C., for a Cultural Heritage Initiatives World Heritage Day Symposium.

### **(3) The ASOR Policy on Professional Conduct**

A major piece accomplishment of ASOR in the past year was institution of a Policy on Professional Conduct (approved by the ASOR Board of Trustees on April 18, 2015). Our continuing thanks go to Lynn Swartz Dodd, the chair of the Ethics Working Group, and her committee members – Thomas Davis, Jane Evans, Larry Herr, and Marian Feldman – for developing the ASOR Policy and shepherding it through the approval process.

In its opening paragraph, the Policy specifies that “this document will be reviewed annually by a subcommittee of ASOR’s Board of Trustees that is empowered to record concerns and to bring forward for discussion to ASOR’s Board of Trustees any action that may contravene the guidelines contained in this policy.” Consequently, in June 2015, I formed the Subcommittee on the ASOR Policy on Professional Conduct, whose members are Tim Harrison (chair), Joe Greene, and Carol Meyers. I also asked this subcommittee to take on a second charge in addition to the charge specified in the Policy, which is to regularly consider possible emendations or changes to the Policy and to make recommendations to the Board accordingly. I added this work to the subcommittee’s charge based on our experiences with the Policy during its first few months “in action”

(so to speak), as several questions regarding interpretation and implementation did come up, especially as the Program Committee worked to apply the Policy in making decisions about papers and posters that, under the Policy's terms, might not be acceptable for presentation at the Annual Meeting.

The Program Committee also fielded at least one protest regarding a paper that was turned down because it was found to violate one of the Policy's precepts, and I have asked the Subcommittee on the ASOR Policy on Professional Conduct to look into this matter. Nevertheless, I have tried to be as clear as I can to all concerned that I am not asking the subcommittee to serve as an adjudicatory body, or an appeals/arbitration committee, to which those who disagree with, say, a Program Committee decision might turn to have that decision overturned. Rather, I take whatever decisions regarding the Policy that are made by all our standing committees, including the Program Committee, to be final. Still, if some protest suggests to the Subcommittee on the ASOR Policy on Professional Conduct that the Policy should perhaps to be changed, or emended, to accommodate a paper, say, that is currently not allowed, then the subcommittee should consider that and make a recommendation to the Board.

This Subcommittee is scheduled to meet for the first time at the Annual Meeting at Atlanta. I have asked its chair, Tim Harrison, to make a preliminary report on its discussions to the Board, but I would anticipate that we would treat any proposed changes somewhat like a by-laws change and distribute the wording of those proposed changes in advance for Board members' consideration. Hence, I would anticipate the first time the Board might be asked to consider changes or emendations is at its April 2016 meeting.

#### **(4) ASOR Fellowship and Grants**

Among ASOR's many accomplishments in the past five years has been our burgeoning fellowship program (it's that theme again: ASOR is thriving!), whereby we provide funding for students to participate in archaeological fieldwork projects in the Middle East and wider Mediterranean. Generally, the amount of each of these fellowships is \$1000, and that amount has been stable for many years. At its October 2015 meeting, however, the Executive Committee voted to experiment with increasing this amount, to \$2000 per fellowship for Summer 2016.

Obviously, this has some cost – we will not be able to give as many fellowships as in the past. But the Executive Committee was swayed by the fact that of the total 125 applications received last year, six were from ASOR associate members, 18 were from ASOR student members, and the rest were from applicants associated with an ASOR Institutional Member school. Which is to say: one of the goals of our fellowship program – to entice applicants to become and remain ASOR members – does not really seem to be working (we had only 24 such applicants, most of whom take out a membership for only one year).

Moreover, it is a time when we are looking to enhance benefits for our Institutional Member schools (since the primary benefit we used to offer, free journal subscriptions, is no longer of appeal in the age of JSTOR). Thus, it seemed worth experimenting with an enhanced fellowship program that might be of greater benefit to our Institutional Member schools and might buy greater loyalty from the students at those schools who receive fellowship funding. We will evaluate the results after the current application season.

We have also restructured the funding of our Harris Grant program (grants made to the PI's of ASOR-affiliated projects) for 2016. More specifically: because of good endowment returns; because we made minimal outlays from the Harris fund last year (when we had only three applications); and because a previous Harris Grant recipient returned funds that had never been used, we have approximately \$10,000 of funding to distribute this year, rather than the usual \$5000-\$6000. In consultation with CAP Chair Tom Levy, we have therefore agreed to award \$5000 grants to PI's of two ASOR-affiliated projects this year.

We are also extremely pleased that we will be adding another fund to the funding available to fieldwork PI's through the Harris Grants: this is the Joe Seger Excavation Fund. This fund has just, as I write, met its fundraising goal of \$50,000. As many on the Board perhaps know, this year is Joe's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, and ASOR is honored to be able to establish the Joe Seger Excavation Fund in celebration of this joyous event!

### **(5) More Kudos and Some Changes**

Last year, the Honors and Awards Committee inaugurated two new awards, the ASOR Popular Book Award and the ASOR Annual Meeting Poster Award. Board members will recall that at our April meeting, we voted to accept the recommendation of the Honors and Awards Committee to attach the names of two of ASOR's luminaries to these awards and so designate them (pending the approval of the designees and their families) as the Nancy Lapp Popular Book Award and the Joy Ungerleider Annual Meeting Poster Award. I am pleased that both Nancy Lapp and the family of Joy Ungerleider responded enthusiastically and most graciously to our proposal, and, indeed, Nancy Lapp decided, for the first time in many years, to attend the ASOR meeting to be present for the inaugural presentation of the award in her name. So kudos to both the Honors and Awards Committee, for their excellent initiative, and to Nancy and the Ungerleider family for the honor ASOR has been able to extend to them.

We owe our thanks and praise also – although a bittersweet thanks and praise – to Sheldon Fox, who is leaving our Board after nine years of service, including six years as ASOR Treasurer. As all of us who have served with Sheldon know, he has done extraordinary things on ASOR's behalf. During his tenure as Treasurer, he managed our finances superbly and secured the turn-around that has become so routine that we now almost take it for granted: that ASOR runs, every year, a balanced budget.

Sheldon has also generously given of his professional expertise in helping manage ASOR investments, which – like the rest of the organization – have thrived, and the total value

of our endowed funds now stands at approximately \$1.5 million. I looked back at the oldest investment report I could find in my files – from June 30, 2006 – and ASOR’s endowment funds at that time had a value of about \$750,000. Moreover, at their lowest point, in February 2009, after the 2008 financial crisis, the endowed funds had a value of about \$535,000. In short, the value of that February 2009 endowment has tripled in the last six years, and while some of the credit goes to our extraordinary fund-raising efforts during the Building a Foundation for ASOR Campaign, much credit goes to Sheldon’s investment advice.

And, by the way, Sheldon is no slouch when it comes to fund-raising. He was a member of the Building a Foundation for ASOR Campaign Cabinet, and he has personally spearheaded the fundraising for the Carol and Eric Meyers Fellowship (currently endowed at about \$55,000). So, Sheldon, we will miss you, and we extend our most profound and deepest thanks for all you have done in service to ASOR.

As always in November, we will, of course, be welcoming new members onto the Board, including (for the first time ever) individual and institutional members who were elected through online voting. As this moment, we don’t have precise numbers about the effect of this shift to voting online, but I can say roughly that when compared to those who voted in last year’s election that was held at the Members’ Meeting, about three times as many institutional representatives voted online and about four times as many individual members. We still have a ways to go: about one-third of institutional members voted, and about one-fifth of individual members – and we’d like to eventually see an enfranchisement rate of, say, 50%. But we’re moving in the right direction!

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And on that note, I end where I began: ASOR is moving in the right direction, or, in other words, ASOR is thriving! It is a great personal joy to me to have the honor and privilege of serving as ASOR’s President during such an exciting time in our organization’s history, and I thank each and every one of you, so much, for all the many, many things you do to foster ASOR’s amazing success.