

President's Report
ASOR Board of Trustees
April 17, 2016

Much has happened since our Board last met in November, 2015, and so I fear the report that follows will be long. I'll thus get right to it!

(1) Strategic Planning

At its meeting on November 22, 2015, members of the ASOR Board of Trustees participated in a working breakfast with members of the ASOR Strategic Planning Task Force and discussed their reactions to the draft of the 2016-2020 ASOR Strategic Plan.

This breakfast was part of a more comprehensive effort to gather feedback to the draft Strategic Plan that the Task Force began developing in February 2015. Feedback was solicited at the April 2015 meeting of the Board of Trustees, the October 2015 meeting of the ASOR Executive Committee, and from the ASOR Chairs Coordinating Council, in its conference calls in May, October, and November 2015 and in March 2016. We also asked the Chairs of ASOR's various standing committees to solicit feedback from their committee members, and we put drafts of the Strategic Plan out for comment to the entire ASOR membership in November 2015 and again (in revised form) in February 2016.

As a result of this process, the Strategic Planning Task Force is confident it has developed a document that reflects our members' ambitions for ASOR in the next five years. The time has now come to act, and at our April 17 Board meeting, I will be asking the Board to vote to approve the Strategic Plan. It is my hope that the Board will vote affirmatively, so that we can then take on the goals the Strategic Plan sets out. As the Plan itself acknowledges, our goals are ambitious, and accomplishing them will require the development of expertise in emerging areas (such as digital publishing), sufficient funding, and hard work.

At this moment, though, other hard work comes to a close, and I would like to my thanks to the members of the Strategic Planning Task Force who got us this far: Gary Arbino, Vivian Bull, Richard Coffman, Sharon Herbert, Øystein LaBianca, Heather Parker, B. W. Ruffner, Frederick Winter, and J. Edward Wright. As the Chair of the Task Force, I can state unequivocally that these Task Force members have been more than generous with their time and their wisdom, and beyond patient with me as I have asked for this time and wisdom again and again. ASOR cannot thank them enough for all they have done to contribute to the Strategic Planning process.

(2) ASOR's Annual Meeting

One of the goals identified in the 2016-2020 Strategic Plan is for ASOR to "conduct an exceptional professional meeting dedicated to scholarship on the history and cultures of the Near East and the wider Mediterranean world." The Strategic Plan lays out four different aspects of the Annual Meeting that require particular attention, the fourth of

which is the need to reevaluate the timing and location of the Annual Meeting. As noted in the Strategic Plan, this need is driven by the reunification of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL), and the consequence—ASOR’s increasing inability to access hotel space reasonably close to the AAR/SBL meeting.

The Board may also remember that I asked its permission, at the November 22, 2015, meeting to go ahead and enact the procedure that the Strategic Plan envisions for undertaking this reevaluation: the establishment of an *ad hoc* Annual Meeting committee, charged with (i) evaluating the meetings in Atlanta (2015) and San Antonio (2016), to gauge the impact of the lack of geographical proximity to AAR/SBL and the number of ASOR members affected, and (ii) making recommendations about the way forward.

I am very pleased to report that Gary Arbino, of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, has agreed to chair this committee. As many of you know, Gary is a former ASOR Trustee and has been a deeply engaged member of ASOR in many other respects, so I am confident he knows our organization and its needs well. Yet Gary is also a long-standing and deeply engaged member of SBL, so he also knows that “side of the aisle.” Gary and I are in the process of identifying six or so other committee members, including a representative from the ASOR Program Committee. I have also asked Arlene Press, the ASOR Meetings Manager, to provide support to the committee in an advisory capacity (regarding, for example, some of the ins-and-outs of hotel contracts and what is and is not possible for hotels in terms of meeting scheduling). Gary and I have in addition agreed on a timetable for the committee’s work, which will culminate (we hope) with it submitting a report on its findings and recommendations to the Board in April 2017.

In the meantime, the Board should know that SBL reached out to us early in the new year, asking for a face-to-face meeting involving the ASOR President, the ASOR Executive Director, the SBL Executive Director (John Kutsko), and the President of the SBL Council (Mark Foskett, of Wake Forest University), to talk about ways ASOR might be able to continue to meet in the same place and roughly the same time as SBL. That meeting took place on Mar 13, 2016, in Washington, D.C.: in addition to the participants listed above, Gary Arbino joined by phone and Sidnie White Crawford joined as a third SBL representative.

The meeting began with John Kutsko presenting a report from the AAR/SBL hotel booking company (Experient), which essentially said that the only way it was possible to have the ASOR and SBL meetings in the same place at roughly the same time was for ASOR to shift its meeting forward by a day, so we would begin on Tuesday and end on Friday. From my point of view, this was a non-starter, as the vast majority of our members need to be at work for most of the work week and could not possibly take four days (Tuesday-Friday) off from teaching, or their law practice, or whatever.

But we did talk our way to what I thought was a reasonable compromise: for ASOR to meet from Wednesday noon to Saturday noon (versus Wednesday night to Saturday night) — this would minimize our Saturday overlap with AAR/SBL and address their

need for Saturday hotel space. And it could, in fact, be good for our meeting in some ways (as the meeting always feels pretty dead by Saturday afternoon, when the exhibitors have pulled out and many ASOR members have left for SBL).

However, John Kutsko wrote on Apr 5, 2016, to say that, having checked back with Experient, it was not possible to accommodate an ASOR meeting that ran from Wednesday noon-Saturday noon, and SBL therefore retreated back to the position that the only possible solution—if we were to meet in the same place and roughly the same time as AAR/SBL—was for ASOR to meet from Tuesday-Friday.

Gary Arbino has been apprised of all of this, and it is now on his committee's plate to take this conversation forward.

(3) ASOR's Cultural Heritage Initiatives

The reason our Executive Director, Andy Vaughn, and I were in Washington, D.C., on Mar 13, 2016, and for the several days following, was to attend the annual meeting of the National Humanities Alliance. This also responds to one of the goals set forward in the Strategic Plan: that ASOR will advocate frequently and forcefully on behalf of the field of Near Eastern and wider Mediterranean studies and to assert the overall value of the humanities, through, for example, working with the National Humanities Alliance.

We were very pleased, moreover, that this year, our work in conjunction with the National Humanities Alliance also allowed us to advocate on behalf of the protection and preservation of the cultural heritage of the ancient Near East. More specifically: the annual meeting of the National Humanities Alliance always includes a “advocacy day” on Capitol Hill, where Humanities Alliance delegates meet with representatives from various congressional delegations. In preparing for this “advocacy day,” the National Humanities Alliance responded positively to ASOR's request that one of the five foci of the Alliance's advocacy be S. 1887, the “Protect and Preserve International Cultural Property Act.” At <http://www.asor.org/hidden/board-info/>, where we posted Board documents for our April 17, 2016, meeting, you will find a copy of the document about S. 1887 that National Humanities Alliance advocates distributed on Capitol Hill.

ASOR members have identified the passing of this bill as a high priority, as it is designed to protect and preserve international cultural property at risk due to instability, armed conflict, or natural or other disasters by imposing restrictions on the importing of such material into the United States and by designating, within the staff of the Department of State, a U.S. Coordinator for International Cultural Property Protection and a Coordinating Committee on International Cultural Property Protection, in order to conduct effective oversight. Indeed, our Board Chair, B.W. Ruffner, has been instrumental in persuading Sen. Bob Corker of Tennessee, who serves as Chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, to move this legislation forward. Andy and I were pleased to join in these efforts by meeting with the staffs of several other members of the Foreign Relations committee—Sen. Ben Cardin (MD), Sen. Johnny Isakson (GA), Sen. David Perdue (GA), and Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (NH)—as well as with the staffs of several

other senators and representatives (a total of 8 scheduled meetings for Andy, and 9 for me).

The result, in addition to the hoped-for result of getting S. 1887 passed and to President Obama's desk, was a lot of great visibility for ASOR in the offices of the Senate and the House of Representatives. ASOR was also prominently featured at the National Humanities Alliance meetings on the previous day, where the Chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities William "Bro" Adams specifically mentioned the NEH-funded summit that ASOR convened in Washington, D.C., in December 2015 in conjunction with the AIA. More specifically: Chairman Adams cited this summit, which brought together over twenty organizations engaged in cultural heritage projects in Syria and nearby regions, as an example of the way NEH is promoting the public relevance of the humanities, by showcasing the powerful opportunities the humanities have to speak to important issues in the public sphere.

ASOR's Cultural Heritage Initiatives also continue to receive public recognition in other venues: most recently, in an NBC News report from April 6, 2016:

<http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/smuggler-stolen-artifacts-palmyra-speaks-out-about-isis-illicit-operation-n551806>.

And, of course, ASOR is sponsoring a public event to which you are all invited, "Protecting, Preserving, and Presenting the Cultural Heritage of the Near East to the Public," on April 18th (Monday), following our April 17, 2016, Board meeting in Washington D.C. I am especially proud of the fact that this event, in addition to including remarks from Michael Danti, from our ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives team, features two members of our Board, Hanan Charaf and Øystein LaBianca, who will speak, respectively, on efforts to preserve and protect the cultural heritage of Lebanon and Jordan.

(4) ASOR's Webpage and the ASOR Brand

Board members present at the November 22, 2015, meeting will remember that in conjunction with our discussions of ASOR's webpage, the Board voted to contract with a branding consultant to help with webpage development and to advise us regarding other aspects of ASOR's image and self-presentation. The Board also charged the Strategic Planning Task Force to serve as the body that would represent ASOR in working with this consultant.

As I reported in my letter to the Board on January 21, 2016, our Treasurer, Richard Coffman, and I spent December identifying possible consultants and then soliciting bids and interviewing our top candidates. In early January, we recommended to the Executive Committee that we contract with C&G Partners, in New York City. ASOR entered into that contract later in January, and we began our work with C&G shortly thereafter.

The first stage of this work involved what C&G calls a "discovery" phase, where C&G tried to get the best possible sense of us as an organization. To aid in this, we sent C&G a lot of ASOR "stuff": copies of our publications and of various brochures; samples of our

business cards, stationery, greeting cards; program books from the Annual Meeting; a few items of ASOR swag. C&G also conducted telephone interviews with sixteen different ASOR members, whom we chose to represent different ASOR constituencies (long-time leaders; up-and-coming younger members; international members; members whose degree of involvement with ASOR was about average; members who were less involved than we might like; members whose professional expertise lies outside the Near East and wider Mediterranean; representatives of the Friends of ASOR).

We also convened a half-day meeting in Washington, D.C., on January 29, 2016, with the Strategic Planning Task Force and the principal at C&G Partners responsible for our project, Maya Kopytman. In this meeting, as elsewhere in the “discovery” process, C&G initiated discussions about our name, our logo, our website, and our members’ sense of ASOR’s identity (ASOR’s geographical reach; the “Schools” part of ASOR’s name; the place of archaeology in ASOR’s members’ work). On Mar 22, 2016, C&G reported the results of their “discovery” process to the Strategic Planning Task Force.

Perhaps most interesting, initially, were C&G’s findings about ASOR’s name, for while C&G discovered in their phone calls that there was a certain amount of ambivalence among our members about our name, they also reported members expressed no particular enthusiasm for changing it. Indeed, C&G reported (surprisingly to me) that some of our younger members liked the word “Oriental” that others see as the most problematic part of our name, because (it seems) “Oriental” had a sort of retro and antiquarian “vibe” for these members that captured (in a positive way) ASOR’s long history.

The Strategic Planning Task Force also, although it perhaps felt a more profound ambivalence about “Oriental” and more generally ASOR’s name, bogged down when it tried to come up with a satisfactory alternative. Ultimately, C&G’s recommendation is that we remain “ASOR,” but primarily use the acronym rather than the spelled-out name. They also recommend that we develop a tagline to use with the acronym (instead of using the spelled-out name) to explain who we are.

C&G also discovered that there was a certain amount of ambivalence among our members about our logo, as many felt the ankh was too specific to Egypt and that the logo more generally didn’t capture the geographical and temporal scope of ASOR’s members’ work. C&G in addition has raised concerns that we don’t use one set form of our logo consistently, and they have thus engaged the Strategic Planning Task Force in an intensive discussion about logo design.

C&G and the Strategic Planning Task Force have also engaged in an intensive discussion about taglines for ASOR, and we anticipate having some mocked-up logo designs, presented in conjunction with our preferred taglines, to show the Board at our April 17, 2016, meeting. The Strategic Planning Task Force has in addition engaged in intensive discussions with C&G about websites, especially features of websites we like and features we don’t, and we expect that website development will be the primary focus of our conversations as our work with C&G moves into its next phase.

In the meantime, I urge all our Board members to look at the document from C&G Partners, “Discovery Findings and Recommendations,” from March 22, 2016, and the ASOR response that I sent to C&G on March 29, 2016. Both are posted on the Board Trustee page, at <http://www.asor.org/hidden/board-info/>, with other materials for our April 17, 2016, meeting.

(5) ASOR Fellowship and Grants

As many on the Board will remember, I reported in my November 22, 2016, President’s Report that the ASOR Executive Committee had voted to experiment with increasing the funding amount awarded to the recipients of ASOR excavation fellowships. More specifically, we doubled the fellowship amount we had been awarding for excavation fellowships for many years—\$1000 per recipient—to \$2000 per recipient.

Our goal in doing this was to make our fellowships more attractive to applicants—and, ideally, to applicants beyond those who come from institutional member schools. To this end, ASOR has also introduced, on an experimental basis, a new category of undergraduate membership, at the bargain rate of \$29.95, meaning that for the cost of \$29.95, undergraduates get online subscriptions to our journals and become eligible to apply for ASOR fellowship funding.

We can happily report that something worked as a result of these experiments: we received 204 applications for fellowship funding this year, as opposed to only 125 applications in 2015. The bad news, of course, is that we cannot possibly fund all these 204 applicants. Nevertheless, it’s 204 applicants who we can continue to be in contact with and hope to keep engaged with ASOR—even building some of them into full ASOR members in the years going forward.

(6) ASOR’s Boston Office

Speaking of the years going forward, ASOR Board members may recall that I wrote in January that it had been reported, in the e-newsletter *BU Today*, that Boston University was contracting with a commercial real estate company to market the block of buildings in Kenmore Square that includes the ASOR office building at 656 Beacon Street. Since then, nothing much has happened, except that our allies of Boston University—mainly our colleagues in the Archaeology Department there—have assured us they would like to have us stay at BU and are urging their administration to find us other space once our building is sold.

That said, our various neighbors in BU’s buildings in Kenmore Square seem clear that nothing is going to happen fast in terms of a real estate sale: they feel that even if a buyer comes forward, once the lawyers, and bankers, and zoning boards, and planning boards, and neighborhood interest groups all have their say, it will be a couple of years before anything substantive can happen.

(7) Kudos and Changes

This year (2016) marks the third year of the three-year term as President of ASOR to which I was elected in 2013. As many of you have heard me say, I have loved serving as ASOR President over what has now been two-and-a-half years, not least because of the opportunity to work with many of you. I am thus very honored and pleased that the Officers Nominations Committee has nominated me to serve for another three-year term, running from January 1, 2017-December 31, 2019. The Board will vote on this nomination at its April 17, 2016, meeting.

Yet as pleased as I am to know that I have the possibility of serving as ASOR president for another three-year term, I am saddened by the fact that our current Board Chair B.W. Ruffner, has chosen to step down at the end of his current term, on June 30, 2016. When B.W. stepped into the position of Board Chair, he had enormous shoes to fill, those of the venerable P.E. MacAllister. Not an enviable position! But B.W. has excelled in carrying on P.E.'s legacy, both in his work for ASOR behind the scenes and in his role as a public face and voice for our organization.

I, in particular, am grateful for B.W.'s openness toward collaboration and experimentation, especially as we have sought to restructure the format of Board meetings and make them more engaged and interactive. Anyone who has run a classroom, as many of us have, knows that relinquishing control at the front of the room to allow for small-group interactions and free-flowing brainstorming—and the sometimes unexpected and even unwelcome responses that can result—is not necessarily a comfortable position to be in.

But B.W. has taken on this challenge with enthusiasm, and his enthusiasm has been a major part of the reason why the experiments we have tried in revising the structuring of our Board meetings have succeeded. I could not be more grateful—nor could I be more grateful for the personal support he has offered me and his efforts to make sure I was affirmed when I was doing a good job.

Of course, it is not just I who has reason to be grateful to B.W., but all of ASOR, and I would especially highlight here B.W.'s work as the Chair of the Management Committee in the mid-2000's, during a time when ASOR was struggling with immense leadership and financial challenges. The work B.W. did at that time was critical in ensuring that ASOR could pull itself out of the hole it was in and move forward to be the (extraordinary successful) organization it is today. ASOR cannot thank B.W. enough for all he did then, and has continued to do, and we will miss him as our Chair.

We are grateful, though, that our Officers Nominations Committee has been successful in identifying a candidate to replace B.W. as Board Chair, and one who is well known to many on our Board: our current Treasurer, Richard Coffman. This has required, of course, that our Officers Nominations Committee also identify a candidate to replace Richard as Treasurer, and, again, we are grateful that they have done so: Chris White. Both candidates will be voted on by the Board at its April 17, 2016, meeting.

Finally, our April 17, 2017, meeting is an opportunity to welcome three new Board colleagues: Jane DeRose Evans, Jeffrey Blakely, and Peyton Randolph (Randy) Helm. We're very happy to have these new colleagues on our Board!

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As I hope you can see, I was right to note at the beginning of this report that much has happened since our Board last met in November 2015. But what is more important to note is that much that is *good* has happened: we are coming to the end of an extremely thorough and thoughtful Strategic Planning process; we continue to be recognized as important leaders in the fight to protect and preserve the cultural heritage of the Near East, especially the cultural heritage of regions experiencing conflict; we are engaged in deliberations and experimentation to make sure our excavation fellowships and our Annual Meeting best serve the needs of our constituents; and we are making exciting progress in our work to develop a new website and, more generally, to enhance ASOR's image and self-presentation. It is an exciting, even exhilarating time to be a part of ASOR, and I thank you all for joining me on that ride!