

Dear Maya,

Thanks very much for the presentation you gave to our ASOR Branding Task Force last week. I've now been able to get some feedback from seven of our eleven Task Force members (not counting me). I am afraid that the Easter holiday weekend has meant that several people have been otherwise occupied. Nevertheless, here's what I can report.

**Regarding Slides #16-17, the terms that describe ASOR (especially Slide 17):**

Of the seven people who responded to me, two (independently) suggested that the term "caretakers" (or "curators") be added, and four (independently) suggested that the term "modest" be deleted. For one, the concern with "modest" is that it seems imprecise: this Task Force member (jokingly) asked whether this meant we didn't excavate in the nude. For another, it was too "folksy." For the third, the concern was that it had sort of negative connotations to it: it didn't make us sound bold, dynamic, forward-thinking, etc. Two members raised concerns about "transitioning" for the same reasons: that it makes us sound like we don't have our act together.

Two people also (independently) balked at the term "family": for one, it was again too "folksy"; another suggested substituting "collegial" for "family" (as some members whose professional expertise lies outside the fields of Near Eastern and Mediterranean studies can feel excluded from the "family-like" closeness that can exist between people who have lived cheek by jowl for weeks together during the course of an archaeological excavation). "Collegial" came up in the comments of another respondent as well.

Some other comments I heard (from two respondents): add "established"; add "multinational"; add "respectable" (or maybe "respected").

Some other comments I heard (each of these from one person only): add "visual" (to stress how much we work with the material remains of the Near Eastern and wider Mediterranean); add "academic"; add "cutting edge"; add "knowledgeable"; add "longing" ("as our particular region is a geographical landscape longed for by followers of three major world religions"); add "contested" ("as it surely is impossible to ignore the conflicts that plague the region and that impact our work and our community of scholars").

Finally, one person expressed reservations about "passionate" and "antiquarian," the former because it was too clichéd, the latter because it was too stuffy and old-fashioned. This colleague admitted, however, that maybe the ASOR members (the younger generation) who like "Oriental" would like "antiquarian" as well.

And I, personally, am glad to see that "glacial" did not make the Slide #17 list!

**Regarding Slides #26-27, the logos:**

Four of my respondents liked the CAORC logo. According to one, it had clean lines, was

minimalist, and contained the right amount of legible and understandable information to identify the organization; according to another, it was colorful and dynamic, and this colleague liked the fact that the prose was a tag line, not the spelling out of the acronym; a third colleague also liked the tag line that does not spell out the acronym, which she thought would work well for ASOR. This same colleague wrote that "I also like introducing some visual element to lettering," although she added that "the choice of design in the O of CAORC does not shout 'international/global' to me, which might be a disadvantage, on the other hand I like graphics that are more stylized and less literal."

Five of my respondents also liked the African Studies Association logo. It again was praised for having clean lines, being minimalist, and containing the right amount of legible and understandable information to identify the organization. Another wrote, "This one is my favorite. It is a very simple design with an elegance to it. The graphics provide a generic reference to African visual patterning (I think, or at least that's the association I have with it). I can imagine some kind of stylized cuneiform pattern with ASOR (just the acronym)."

Five out of seven respondents also liked the World Monuments Fund logo. Once more, it was described as having clean lines, being minimalist, and containing the right amount of legible and understandable information to identify the organization.

Some split opinions emerged about ARCE (one respondent numbered it among the three best; two listed it among the logos they liked the least). Also split opinions emerged about SCS (one respondent numbered it among the three best; one listed it among the logos he liked the least).

In addition, there were split opinions about CEMAT: one respondent liked it because "visually, I like it a lot . . . it is simple and the logo is the acronym. I like the line decoration that would work well large scale or small scale." That said, she added, "I did not know what CEMAT stood for until I googled it, so there is a disadvantage to only using the acronym." For another respondent, this was precisely the problem: the logo said nothing about who CEMAT is and what they do. Finally, split opinions about CAARI: one like; one dislike (it was described as having too much going on and being too busy).

The bad news for Maya (!): the Bible Lands Museum got three "do not like" votes from my respondents. In the words of one colleague, "While the simplicity of the sea and sun is good, the crayon-drawing quality didn't work for me and the red brackets seemed out of place."

Other logos that got "dislike" votes: ACOR (2 respondents), MESA (2 respondents), AIIS, SAA, AIAR.

Finally, one of our respondents added a few other logos to the mix. She described all of these as designs that originate in meaningful images, but are simplified and stylized so they are recognizable large and small.



Regarding websites, Slides #28-49, respondents indicated generally:

"The architecture needs to be straightforward and usable, not old fashioned and clunky; bright colors rather than dull; stay away from static but don't make it confusing with bells and whistles; satisfy needs of interested non experts as well as pros, etc."

Concerning this last topic, another wrote that the issue of audience is an important topic. She went on to say that, "As a lay person I would be put off by too many links and dropdown menus that were unfamiliar to me or felt "insider" (committee membership, affiliation, even annual meeting etc.) I think a lot of that stuff can and should be behind a link for ASOR members. Accessible to everyone, but just one additional click away." On the other hand, she went on to say, "If our goal is to serve ASOR membership (without being a "public service" type site, then I'd pull back on this opinion."

Somewhat similarly, regarding audience (and here presuming the primary audience is ASOR members): "As a literate scholarly society and one that is aiming, I would suspect, to attract similarly literate constituents, I'm much less text-adverse for our website than our consultants appear to be."

Finally, also regarding audience, one respondent asked: "What appeals to our target audience. Has that been defined and, if so, what appeals to them?"

In terms of specific websites, CAORC got four "like" votes from my respondents. Comments included "clean, crisp, modern, sophisticated, engaging colors and design, creative navigational tools, plenty of white space"; "I dig the red Donate button"; "a good blend of images and text to appeal to visitors to the site who are familiar with the council and those who might be there without knowing much—it's fairly easy for both audiences to get where they want to go"; " they do seem to have their act together"; " clean and uncluttered in terms of both texts and image."

The Society for Classical Studies website also got three "like" votes: "for the pros C&G identified"; "short and concise navigation tabs and limited number of them; also like footer on each page and images that rotate"; "I like Greek pots."

Other likes (two votes): the ASOR SHI website ("nice photos, concise navigations tabs, and easy to use"); World Monuments Fund ("my favorite," according to one of its supporters, and "by far my favorite; great imagery and inviting for visitors" according to the other); Oxfam America ("I like this site because it is simple and direct. Anyone who goes there a) knows what they do and b) finds at least one link that he/she can connect with [even if it's the "explore" button]. Visually it is very simple—and I like the extremely small number of action links [volunteer, take action, give monthly]. I can see an ASOR site with simple portals like that [professionals, students, explore] or something like that that leaves most of the home page for 'news' items.")

Likes cited by one respondent: Quinn Foundation, World Wildlife Fund, and Doctors Without Borders.

In terms of dislikes, everyone cited SBL: ("way too busy and hard to find anything; I

wouldn't go there if I didn't already know the site"; "yucky colors"; "there apparently was a sale on brown paint that year"). Two people also cited that AAR website as a "dislike" "too busy"; "dense"). One respondent also thought the ARCE site was "too busy and confusing," and another commented the Met site was "too cluttered."

### **Re Slides #51-55, images:**

Everyone thought the images you had collected were appropriate and that the suggested "categories" (architecture, writing, agriculture, etc.) were fine. The only specific comments I got were as follows:

"I like the ibex pot on the top row of the conference call's slide 51. Here's why: the image exudes antiquity, which remains the key focus of ASOR, but it also doesn't conjure up a strong sense of any one of the cultures covered by our organization, which means it doesn't give a sense of excluding any one of our cultures. Using any one of the key language forms included in our slide stack, or any one of the culturally-linked iconic images (e.g. the Ishtar Gate), would seem to seem to focus too much on a single culture. That, indeed, is for me one of the main problems with our current ankh-cuneiform icon. And as another point in its favor, the pot is aesthetically pleasing."

"What about the bedouin tent? What about the little people? What about daily life? This line-up gives the impression we are only dealing with the elites . . . [it is important] that we not leave out the little traditions, the images of daily life in our region."

### **Re taglines:**

I asked respondents to vote on the four you recommended on Slide #58, with 10 being the highest possible score and 1 the lowest. Four of the seven respondents voted; here are the totals (out of 40):

31.25 Ancient Sites for Modern Insights (although one respondent commented "I am not crazy about the word 'for.' It doesn't seem to make grammatical sense. I think maybe I would prefer a comma or a period").

26.25 Unearthing and Preserving the Human Story (but according to one respondent, "maybe with an added gerund; something like understanding"; comments from another, "I like the Human Story aspect -- it feels very universal -- and the other verbs are a very accurate description . . . I like the sentiment").

17.5 Know the Past. Understand the Present (Comments: "I like the simple construction of this one; though I think the verbs feel a little bland. 'Interpret the Past. Understand the Present' sounds slightly better to me"; "simple and meaningful, and it successfully conveys what we do and why we do it. Who needs more?"; "too dogmatic").

17.5 Discover. Understand. Preserve. (Comments: "too bossy"; "This feels like a less successful version of the AIA tagline. Also, there is not much in here to relate to the

ancient world . . . Couldn't this tagline make equal sense if adopted by the Wild Blueberry Association of America?"; "Comes close . . . but it is still missing key components—such as what, when, and where . . . so modify to 'Discover, Illuminate, and Preserve the Cradle of Humanity.'" Regarding specifics, this respondent writes, "I like 'Illuminate' better than 'Understand.' 'Illuminate' is much richer and multi-layered; it encompasses the concepts of research, deep understanding, and sharing in a way that is more than just teaching the facts, but rather, sharing in a way that infuses the topic with scholarship, original thought, and how the topic or artifact, for example, fits within its context, as well as within the grand scheme of things.")

Other taglines that got thrown into the mix: We Bring the Past to Life; We Explore, Explain, and Preserve Our Past; Dig Deeper, Reach Higher

Overall, one respondent wrote: the ideal tagline is one that is regionally appropriate, chronological, descriptive as to who we are and what we do, has a call to action, and is ASOR-missional (i.e., conveys our relationship to the past, our mission to explain, and our mission to preserve for the future).

#### **Finally, in terms of overall take-aways:**

**Positive** -- My respondents were pleased with the presentation and generally seemed to feel that we have made a smart choice in choosing to work with C&G Partners. As one wrote, "Overall I was very impressed with the work they have done." According to another, the presentation was "thorough and enlightening . . . I have much confidence in the process and look forward to seeing next steps." Yet another commented, "I was very impressed with their ability to look at the whole picture—from color schemes to logo use and misuse, to visually complicated websites (as frequent users we often overlook the 'infelicities.'"

In terms of specifics, one respondent was grateful for the focus on developing a tagline that defines ASOR rather than spelling out the name, so that ASOR becomes like IBM or KFC with a tagline. Another wrote that, "clearly there is an attachment to the ASOR acronym." A third wrote, "I reluctantly agree that changing the name is a bad idea, but if we just front the abbreviation without the full name, we can live with that. I am especially concerned about the impact on publications, especially *BASOR*."

**Red Flags** -- Archaeology needs to be spelled correctly!

More seriously, there was one vote for "tradition," both for preserving the ASOR "blue and somehow preserving the ASOR ankh. There was similarly a vote for preserving the dingir part of the logo (that's the cuneiform design inside the ankh). More generally, I heard that it was important that "our logo somehow link to our geographical region."

There was also a little disagreement over the issue of a guide sheet and rules for the brand. For one respondent, this seemed very important: we need to listen to what you tell us about what doesn't work from a design/branding point of view, even if we like it or it

works for what we are trying to communicate. For another, however, "I'm willing to be more flexible than their branding guidelines would have us be. Thus, the various modes and fonts used in the past for the ASOR ankh-cuneiform symbol don't bother me. They are all recognizable as ASOR, and as such the differences in (minor) elements of presentation aren't a concern." And a third expressed a middle ground: "I like the idea of a guide sheet and rules for the brand and . . . they will help, but this is a very small piece of the task ahead of us for the next 5 years."