

**President's Report**  
**ASOR Board of Trustees**  
**November 20, 2016**

Next month (December 2016) will mark the end of my first term as ASOR President. As that date approaches, it seems a good time to look back and take stock – and also a good time to look forward to my second term. But before I do so, let me again state my gratitude to the Board for electing me for both a first and second term and express how honored and also humbled I am by your confidence in me.

**Taking Stock, Part I**

When I first became ASOR President, in January 2014, I told several of you that my foremost goal was not to screw up the many parts of ASOR's work that were going well, and especially not to screw up programs that were core to ASOR's mission. In my mind, these included publications, fellowships, and the Annual Meeting.

I think it is fair to say these programs are all, three years later, in good and even excellent shape. With regard to publications, I am especially pleased that our journals continue to appear on schedule, both because we thereby honor our commitment to our members to deliver one of our most important member benefits in a timely fashion and because delivering journals on schedule to library subscribers has important and positive implications for our subscriptions revenue and thus for our overall budget.

I am also pleased that we have achieved several important transitions regarding editorial positions. Most notably, at *BASOR*, Eric Cline and Chris Rollston have successfully taken on the significant challenge of filling the oversized shoes of the venerable Jim Weinstein, who co-edited and then edited *BASOR* for twenty years (1994-2014). Eric and Chris, moreover, have recently informed Chuck Jones, the Chair of the Committee on Publications, that they would like to stand for a second term (to run from July 1, 2017, through June 30, 2020). I will ask the Board to vote on this at its April 2017 meeting.

Also, Thomas Schneider continues to thrive in what is now his fifth year (and second term) as editor of *Near Eastern Archaeology*. Thomas's second term will expire December 31, 2017. As for the *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* and the JCS Supplemental monograph series, the considerable energy Piotr Michalowski brings to editing these publications continues unabated. And the editors for the two other monograph series – Kevin McGeough, editor of AASOR/Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research and Hanan Charaf, editor of ARS/Archaeological Report Series – have overseen the publication of several volumes since each was appointed for an initial editorial term, beginning January 1, 2015: most recently, Ron Tappy's *The Archaeology of the Ostraca House at Israelite Samaria* in AASOR and Burton MacDonald, Geoffrey A. Clark, Larry G. Herr, D. Scott Quaintance, Hani Hayajneh, and Jürg Egger, *The Shammakh to Ayl Archaeological Survey, Southern Jordan (2010-2012)*, in ARS.

In addition, there are two other publication successes that deserve mention: first, our *News@ASOR* e-newsletter, which has been so successful since its inception, in January 2013, that we moved, in June 2015, to publishing it twice a month rather than just monthly. ASOR is extremely grateful for the generous gift of the Kershaw Family Trust that makes this possible, which comes to us through our beloved Honorary Trustee Norma Kershaw. Our other e-newsletter, *The ANE Today*, which was inaugurated in April 2013, also continues to thrive (Volume IV, Issue 11, just appeared on November 8, 2016). Again, the generosity of ASOR's good friends – in this case, Trustee W. Mark Lanier and former Trustee Stevan Dana -- make the publishing of *The ANE Today* possible. Equally important: the Friends of ASOR initiative that has been spearheaded by Stevan Dana and that is associated with *The ANE Today* has experienced good growth in the past three years, expanding from 8164 members at the end of 2014 to 12,300 today.

The fellowships program also has had a good run for the past three years; indeed, the heart of our fellowship program – excavation fellowships – has had an extraordinarily good run (ASOR also gives fellowships to help cover students' cost in attending the Annual Meeting, and there is a Mesopotamian Fellowship administered by the Baghdad Committee). In 2014, my first year as president, we awarded \$65,100 in fellowship funding; this year, 2016, we awarded \$82,700. Much of that increase, moreover, is due to recently endowed funding, including the P. E. MacAllister Excavation Fellowships, the Strange and Midkiff Families Excavation Fellowships, and the Eric and Carol Meyers Excavation Fellowships.

Just last year, moreover, we established the Joe Seger Excavation Fund, which is available to help PI's support their fieldwork projects. ASOR also has been the beneficiary in the past three years of an annual gift that supports the William G. Dever Archaeological Fellowship for Biblical Scholars, a two-month travel-study award that allows an untenured faculty member in the field of biblical studies to acquire elementary, first-hand experience in field archaeology and research in Israel.

As for the Annual Meeting: it, too, has had a good run over the past three years. Attendance has held steady at about 900 or so (936 in 2014; 877 in 2015; and 880-900 projected for 2016). The number of paper and poster proposals submitted and the number of sessions in the program has also held steady, more or less: 514 paper proposals and 49 poster proposals in 2014; 477 paper proposals and 42 poster proposals in 2015. But we did have a record 540 paper proposals, along with 38 poster proposals, in 2016. This all translates into 97 paper sessions in 2014; 92 paper sessions in 2015; and 95 paper sessions in 2016.

That said, our Annual Meeting faces some significant challenges going forward: more on this below. But let me conclude this part of my reflections regarding the past three years by noting that the successes of our publications program, our annual meeting, and our fundraising efforts (both for fellowships and beyond) have meant that ASOR has been able to stay the course regarding the most important thing that the president must not allow to be screwed up: ASOR's finances.

More specifically, for the past three years, we have run a balanced budget – as we have since 2007, except for the one year we sustained a loss due to the 2008-2009 financial crisis. Indeed, we have been able to finish each of the past three years with budget surpluses: \$1624 in 2014, \$51,062 in 2015, and \$134,259 in 2016. I wish I could take some credit for this, but in the same way that I am the grateful beneficiary of our excellent journal and monograph editors; of the generous donors to our fellowships program; and of the members who flock to attend and present their work at our Annual Meeting, I am also the beneficiary of others when it comes to our budget: the two ASOR Treasurers with whom it has been my privilege to serve, Richard Coffman and Chris White, our Executive Director Andy Vaughn, and our Assistant Director Selma Omerefendic. They are all scrupulous stewards when it comes to the task of overseeing the wise spending of ASOR’s every penny, and my job – as well as the fiduciary responsibility with which the ASOR Board is charged – is made infinitely easier by their hard and good work.

### **Taking Stock, Part II**

In addition to committing, when I first became ASOR President, not to screw up the many parts of ASOR’s work that were going well, I also knew there were at least three projects that demanded my attention: (1) bringing the “Building a Foundation for ASOR Campaign” to a successful conclusion; (2) also bringing to a successful conclusion the work of the *ad hoc* Ethics Working Group that had been constituted by my predecessor, Tim Harrison; and (3) leading the process to develop an updated Strategic Plan, to follow on the ASOR Strategic Plan for 2011-2015 that Tim Harrison had helped ASOR formulate.

I am extremely pleased that these three tasks have all been accomplished. As all of us well know, the “Building a Foundation for ASOR Campaign” came to an overwhelmingly successful conclusion in June 30, 2014, having raised \$1,702,000, some \$402,000 over our original goal of \$1.3 million. We also had reason to celebrate a little less than a year later, in April 2015, when the ASOR Board of Trustees adopted the Policy on Professional Conduct that had been painstakingly developed and refined by the *ad hoc* Ethics Working Group. Then the next year, in April 2016, the Board adopted “Dig Deeper, Reach Higher: The ASOR Strategic Plan for 2016-2020.”

It is impossible to list here all the individuals who deserve credit for these successes, but I will be so bold as to single out three: P. E. MacAllister, the Honorary Chair of the “Building a Foundation for ASOR Campaign” and the Chair Emeritus of the ASOR Board, Lynn Swartz Dodd, the Chair of the *ad hoc* Ethics Working Group, and ASOR Past President Tim Harrison, whose vision underlay and undergirded our fundraising campaign, our commitment to a Professional Conduct Policy, and the process of strategic planning.

While the “Building a Foundation for ASOR Campaign,” the *ad hoc* Ethics Working Group, and strategic planning for 2016-2020 were projects that were on my radar screen when I became ASOR President in January 2014, other projects that came up were

surprises. The biggest surprise was the Notice of Funding Opportunity that appeared, in April 2014, from the US Department of State, to work to safeguard the cultural heritage of Syria (and, eventually, the parts of Iraq under ISIS control) by documenting damage to cultural heritage sites, promoting global awareness about the scale of damage and destruction, and planning emergency and post-war responses.

I authorized ASOR to apply, although, frankly, we thought of that application as a way to begin developing our expertise in applying for this sort of cultural heritage funding, not because we thought our application would really be successful. But as we all know, we were the successful applicants, and we received first \$600,000 and then an additional \$156,000 in FY 2015 to fund ASOR's Syrian Heritage Initiative (later ASOR's Cultural Heritage Initiatives) and then another \$900,000 in FY 2016.

We have also been approved for another \$200,000 for FY 2017, to continue our work from Year #1 and Year #2 of the project through December 31, 2016, and we are in the process of applying for \$900,000 in State Department funding that would support the Cultural Heritage Initiatives project from January-December 2017. In addition, we have also received support for our cultural heritage work from the J. M. Kaplan Fund and the National Endowment for the Humanities, as well as in-kind support from the Getty Conservation Institute, the World Monuments Fund, and Arnold and Porter, LLC. What all this support indicates is the reputation we have developed for being leaders in the field of cultural heritage protection and preservation in the Near East and wider Mediterranean; indeed, "setting the gold standard," in the words of Secretary of State John Kerry.

Another unexpected project cropped up last November (November 2015), when the discussion we engaged in as a Board about revamping and updating the ASOR website resulted in a directive to examine the entire ASOR "brand." The results will be on display prominently in San Antonio, as we, and our branding consultants at C&G Partners, used the guidance the Branding Task Force (formerly the Strategic Planning Task Force) received in our conversations with the Board last April to develop the new logo and a new tagline for ASOR that will debut at the Annual Meeting. We also have a snazzy new design for our website, which we will be showing the Board in San Antonio. We hope to be able to go live with the site at some point early in the new year.

Finally, Board members will have the opportunity in San Antonio to learn more about the Levantine Ceramics Project (LCP) — <http://www.levantineceramics.org/> — which, as I wrote to the Board on October 24, 2016, is a project run by our colleague Andrea Berlin, currently through Boston University. However, at its October 8-9 meeting, the Executive Committee agreed that ASOR, rather than BU, would become the hosting organization for this project. The EC found that hosting the LCP is an important way ASOR can further its mission to initiate, encourage, and support research into, and public understanding of, the history and cultures of the Near East and wider Mediterranean. Moreover, hosting the LCP — which is an open, crowdsourced tool — will allow ASOR to expand its outreach to colleagues beyond our current members and so will enhance ASOR's international visibility and stature. Hosting the LCP also speaks to ASOR's

commitment, articulated in our recently adopted Strategic Plan, to enhance the digital resources we make available to our members and through our outreach efforts.

For these reasons, and others, the EC voted unanimously that ASOR would enter into an agreement with Andrea to host the LCP for a trial period of five years. I am tremendously excited about this, and I hope all of you will make an effort to learn more about this new ASOR project — either at the Legacy Circle and Friends Dinner in San Antonio, where Andrea will be our featured speaker, or at the LCP Workshop Andrea will conduct during the Annual Meeting.

### **Looking Forward**

As I have just indicated, hosting the LCP will be an important aspect of ASOR's work going forward, and I have also noted already another project that we hope will be part of our future work: a continued cooperative agreement with the Department of State to work on safeguarding the cultural heritage of imperiled regions in the Middle East and wider Mediterranean, especially Syria, northern Iraq, and (as mandated in the State Department's current Notice of Funding Opportunity) Libya.

I also intend that our work going forward will implement more and more aspects of our Strategic Plan for 2016-2020, including renewing the ASOR Books and Monographs series, raising funds for fellowships beyond our excavation fellowship program (including a new "travel to collections" fellowship program we are inaugurating this year), and giving focused attention to some key communities within ASOR: the next generation of professionals in the ancient Near East and the wider Mediterranean, international members, and members and friends who share a passion for ASOR's work but whose professional expertise lies outside Near Eastern and/or Mediterranean studies.

There are also two matters of some urgency to which we must attend: first, the matter of 656 Beacon Street. As I reported to the Board last spring, Boston University announced in January 2016 that the university planned to sell a block of buildings in Kenmore Square, including the building – 656 Beacon Street – where ASOR is housed. On August 12, 2016, we learned – through the e-newsletter *BU Today* – that the buildings have, in fact, been sold. We have been told nothing else officially, but we anticipate we will need to make arrangements for new ASOR office space by March 2018 or so. Developing a plan for what to do about this going forward will be a major discussion item for our San Antonio Board meeting.

I also reported to the Board last spring that we needed to reevaluate the timing and location of the Annual Meeting. 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.

To this end, I have established 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 that this committee, led by Gary Arbino of Gateway Seminary (previously Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary), has begun its work, and many of you have probably seen – and I hope filled out! – the Annual Meeting survey Gary’s committee sent out by e-mail in October. Gary will also report on some of the committee’s deliberations at the Members’ Meeting in San Antonio.

Finally, I note that we will face these challenges without some old friends, as – as is always the case at our November meeting – we say goodbye to trustees whose terms of service have ended: this year former ASOR President Larry Geraty and the “Building a Foundadtion for ASOR Campaign” Chair Robert A. Oden. Both have given generously of their time and their talents, and we at ASOR thank them most profusely for their service.