

President's Report
ASOR Board of Trustees
April 29, 2017

A year-and-a-half ago, in November 2015, I began and ended my President's Report by reporting that ASOR was thriving. Eighteen months later, there are many ways in which this is still the case. Yet since the ASOR Board met in November 2016 in San Antonio, we have hit a few bumps in the road. Below, I detail both the good news and the not-so-good.

I. The Not-So-Good News

ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives. As I reported to the Board by e-mail on January 3, 2017, we had not heard anything at that time about the status of our application for the \$900,000 funding opportunity for 2017 that had been offered by the US Department of State. This funding – were we the successful applicant – would cover Year 3 of ASOR's cooperative agreement with the Department of State to document, protect, and preserve the cultural heritage of Syria and northern Iraq. Moreover, under the terms posted in the 2017 Request for Proposals, the scope of work would expand to include Libya. As I noted in that January 3 e-mail, it was disconcerting not to have heard, as the funding opportunity specified a start date of January 1, 2017.

Finally, though, on March 27, we did receive an official "letter of intent" from the Department of State, indicating the Department was prepared to award us \$900,000 to continue our collaborative "Safeguarding the Heritage of the Near East Initiative." That letter of intent stated that the funding was to run from March 31, 2017, through March 31, 2018. However, the letter also stated that the funding was contingent on working out some details regarding the precise scope of work and regarding the budget. As I wrote to the Board on March 27, we anticipated that those details would be worked out in a phone call that was to take place either that day or the next. In point of fact, as of the date on which this President's Report is being posting (April 25, 2017), no call has taken place – and despite *numerous* efforts on our part to make it happen. However, ASOR was notified by a Department of State representative on this date (April 25, 2017) that the Department expects that ASOR "will have a grant to sign" on May 1, 2017. At that point, the funding should be released.

In the meantime, we concluded the work that was covered under the cooperative agreement for Year 2. More specifically, we submitted to the Department of State the final report for Year 2 (dated December 2016), and as of March 31, 2017, we removed from our payroll staff whom we were paying through the Department of State funding. We continued to fund staff whose work supports projects that are funded through other sources (e.g., the Getty Conservation Institute).

Not surprisingly, this has all made something of a hash of our budget, as we have had to rejigger the FY17 budget repeatedly to reflect "if we have the funding"/"if we don't" scenarios (as you can see by comparing the FY 17 Budget to FY 17 Actual in Exhibit C

in the Finance Committee Report). Also, although we have budgeted for FY 18 as if we have the Department of State funding, and although we will ask the Board to approve this "as if we have it" FY 18 budget at our April 29, 2017, meeting, this FY 18 budget will have to be considered provisional in some respects as we continue to try to work the details of Year 3 funding out with the Department of State.

Yet even amid this uncertainty, we are planning to end FY17 with a slight surplus (currently projected at a whopping \$239,341). We have been helped in this regard by the fact that ASOR's digital media specialist, Kaitlynn Anderson, resigned in late March to take a position elsewhere. For the time being, we are not replacing Kaitlynn, which helps with our bottom line. We are very grateful to the rest of the staff, who have divvied up the most essential work that Kaitlynn covered, in order to make sure those tasks get done as before and on time.

Nevertheless, Kaitlynn's loss is a matter of concern, as one of the goals we identified in our 2016-2020 ASOR Strategic Plan (Goal #7B) was to find "permanent funding for the position of Outreach Specialist in the ASOR Office." The on-again, off-again nature of the Department of State funding, and thus our ability to engage fully our cooperative agreement's project to document, protect, and preserve the cultural heritage of Syria and northern Iraq, also compromises our ability to fulfill all our ambitions regarding Strategic Goal #8 of the 2016-2020 ASOR Strategic Plan, to "participate energetically in worldwide efforts to protect, preserve, and present to the public all aspects of the cultural heritage of the Near East and wider Mediterranean."

That said, even without Department of State funding, we have been able to continue some aspects of our cultural heritage work, through the cooperative agreement with the Getty Conservation Institute I mentioned above. We have also received positive indications regarding a proposal we made to the Whiting Foundation, to digitize cuneiform texts and Islamic manuscripts in Mosul, and I hope to have definite news about this significant (six-figure) grant at the Board meeting on April 29, 2017. ASOR has, moreover, another grant application outstanding, and we have our fingers crossed regarding this funding.

Indeed, despite the frustrations of nailing down the funding from the Department of State, there is much to celebrate here. ASOR should be very proud that we were awarded the \$900,000 Department of State funding in these challenging times for the State Department budget, and we should also be very proud that we have been equally successful in attracting funding from other granting agencies and organizations. All of this is evidence that both the quality and the importance of our cultural heritage work is recognized and appreciated by colleagues nationally and across the globe. More important still: we should be very proud that we are doing this work and thereby doing the best we can to help protect and preserve the cultural heritage of peoples whose lives have otherwise been ravaged beyond measure by the conflicts that rage throughout the Middle East.

The ASOR Office. As I wrote to the Board on March 16, 2017, we heard that afternoon from Ann Cudd, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Boston University, that

ASOR will have to vacate its offices at 656 Beacon Street by May 31, 2017.

This message immediately had us scrambling, for although we had known that our building had been sold by BU to a commercial developer and that we would have to move, we had thought – based on other conversations and anecdotal exchanges – that we would have until March 2018 to find new space. We did quickly decide that it was to our benefit to remain in the Boston area (and, ideally, within the BU geographical orbit) for the immediate future for several reasons, the most important being that this location serves our staff well, and the idea of moving somewhere inaccessible to our staff – and so facing the prospect of losing both our office space and our employees at the end of May – was unimaginable.

Our Executive Director, Andy Vaughn – who is serving as ASOR's point person on this issue – thus immediately began making inquiries, through the BU Real Estate Office (to see if there was space available at BU that was in their purview, as opposed to our current space, which was – until it was sold – controlled by the College of Arts and Sciences) and through commercial real estate agents. We also received at least one helpful lead from a former ASOR Board member.

As of this posting – April 25, 2017 – we have identified two separate spaces very near our current offices in Kenmore Square that we hope to be able to lease, one to house core ASOR staff and be the base for core ASOR functions; the other to house the staff member who services the American Center for Oriental Research (ACOR) and the Cyprus American Archaeological Research Institute (CAARI) and to store documents and related materials that belong to ACOR, CAARI, and the Albright Institute of Archaeological Research (AIAR). This space would also house the Journal Exchange Program that ASOR runs on behalf of ACOR, CAARI, and AIAR. It could in addition be used by ASOR for storage and for some of its cultural heritage work.

We realize that this splitting up of the core ASOR staff and the office housing ACOR, CAARI, and AIAR is not ideal, but the spaces are quite proximate – about .2 mile apart. Also, it is very important to realize that both of the spaces we have identified are scheduled for major renovations by their owners and so only available for a short-term lease, not more (we think) than eighteen months. Moving to these spaces buys us time, that is, while we look for a longer-term solution for our office needs, which would be, we hope, an office in which ASOR, ACOR, CAARI, and AIAR can all be housed.

It is in addition important for the Board to know that we have to pay rent for these spaces, as opposed to the complimentary office space that Boston University has provided us for the last twenty years. And, of course, we will be paying moving expenses – and, given that the spaces we have identified are only available to us for the short term, we will be paying moving expenses twice within the next two years. We have added \$16,000 to cover moving expenses and approximately six weeks rent to the FY 17 budget and \$46,000 for FY 18. This is, obviously, a significant new expense that we must accommodate.

Finally, I must report that securing these spaces has been somewhat like working with the Department of State: we identified the two spaces in which we are interested on March 30, 2017, and April 6, 2017, respectively, and we immediately indicated to the real estate personnel who showed us these spaces that we would like to enter into negotiations to lease them. Yet as of the date of this posting, April 25, 2017, we are still trying to make this happen. We do not have any indications that it cannot happen, and we are not worried that we will be homeless come May 31. Still, it would be nice to have a lease!

II. The Good News

The Annual Meeting. We received nearly 700 abstract submissions for the 2017 Annual Meeting program, as opposed to 540 abstract submissions for 2016. This is an astounding increase, and while we think that "location, location, location" (Boston) is an important factor, it is worth noting that SBL (which, of course, will also be meeting in Boston, in the same week as the ASOR meeting) is reporting about a 10% *decrease* in paper proposals. So there is something more than "location, location, location" going on – which we hope is our growing reputation for "conduct[ing] an exceptional professional meeting dedicated to scholarship on the history and cultures of the Near East and the wider Mediterranean world" (Goal #1 in the ASOR 2016-2020 Strategic Plan).

To accommodate the larger number of papers, the Program Committee has made a one-time decision to expand from our standard structure of running eight concurrent sessions throughout the day on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday to running ten concurrent sessions. Session chairs have also been encouraged to consider putting six papers in their sessions, instead of the more usual five (or even four).

Another (unrelated) policy change that we have instituted this year (and we hope only for this year, as we hope it will not be needed in the future) allows those concerned about registering in advance for the Annual Meeting because of potential travel restrictions the US Government has sought to impose on immigrant and non-immigrant citizens of Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen to delay registering at the Early-Bird rate (which expired April 8) while still being eligible to register at the reduced Early-Bird rate closer to the meeting dates.

Membership. Because one must be a member to present at the Annual Meeting, the significant increase in abstracts submitted for 2017 has helped drive an increase in the number of ASOR members, currently about 1800 individuals (at about this time last year, the number was 1575).

However, the staff has been working very, very hard to increase membership numbers in other ways. For example, the staff has been very diligent about sending out membership reminders early and often, so we have had a better renewal rate. In addition, in February, we offered a discounted renewal rate to some 500 people whose memberships had expired more than nine months ago, and we had 53 people rejoin in response. Our Executive Director Andy Vaughn describes this as by far the most successful campaign that we have had to get former members to rejoin, so we plan to utilize it again.

We have also offered some special membership rates for non-North American students attending the Annual Meeting. The Membership and Outreach Committee had urged us to offer these memberships as we seek to expand ASOR's international reach, which is Strategic Goal #6 of the 2016-2020 ASOR Strategic Plan: "Our Goal: Expand ASOR's increasingly large community of international members (about 22% of our membership, from 35 countries outside North America) and enhance ASOR's engagement with them." We are extremely pleased with the success of this initiative: as of March 31, 2017, 46 non-North American students have taken advantage of it. We hope – of course – to see these non-North American students renew their memberships for years to come.

An important reason behind our hope that our new non-North American student members will renew their memberships in years to come is because we have tried to make to financially feasible for them going forward. More specifically, in mid-February, we instituted new, lower rates for all undergraduate, graduate student, and early career members. An Undergraduate Membership now costs \$24.99 (a \$5 reduction); a Graduate Membership now costs \$69.99 (a \$20 reduction); and the new Early Career Membership costs \$89.99 (a \$40 reduction from the current Regular Membership fee).

Again, we had been urged to establish these new rates by one of our standing committees – the Junior Scholars Committee – and these rates speak as well to one aspect of Strategic Goal #5 of our 2016-2020 ASOR Strategic Plan: "Engage vigorously in processes and programs that promote the success of the next generation of scholars of the Near East and wider Mediterranean world." The fact that we had 45 people sign up for the Early Career Membership within a week of announcing its existence suggests the Junior Scholars Committee and the Strategic Plan had indeed identified a significant need among our members. As of March 31, 2017, 91 people had signed up for a Graduate Membership at the new \$69.99 rate, and 92 had signed up for the new Early Career Membership.

This Early Career Membership – which is standardly available to anyone who has received a terminal degree in his or her field in the past five years – is also available to anyone who writes ASOR and states that his or her total gross income (before taxes) is less than \$65,000 US. We hope this speaks to the needs of some of our less well-paid North American members – those in contingent faculty positions, for example – and also to the needs of international members who come from nations less well resourced than the US and Canada. Again, this helps further Strategic Goal #6 of the 2016-2020 ASOR Strategic Plan, which aims for the greater enfranchisement of ASOR's international members.

Fellowships. As our Treasurer's Report will document in greater detail, it has been a good year for our investments – and so a good year for our fellowship accounts. This means that we were able to award 17 excavation fellowships using the returns from the Platt, Wright/Meyers, P. E. MacAllister, Strange and Midkiff Families, and Eric and Carol Meyers Fellowship funds. We were also able to augment these funds with donations we raise annually through the Heritage Fellowship program and contributions that support the Harva L. Sheeler Excavation Fellowships, as well as monies raised

during our March Fellowship Madness fund drive. Overall, we funded 24 excavation fellowships of \$2000 each.

I am extremely pleased to report, moreover, that the money for one of the fellowships funded during March Fellowship Madness was raised through our Friends of ASOR program, which suggests that this important outreach initiative – key to Strategic Goal #7 of the 2016-2020 ASOR Strategic Plan (to “expand our outreach efforts to, and engagement with, the general public”) – is doing well. Indeed, between September 30, 2016, and now, the Friends of ASOR program grew from 12,214 members to over 14,300.

Our excavation fellowships support ASOR student members and students at ASOR member schools. I am very pleased, however, that this year we were able to increase the funding opportunities available to ASOR members who have finished their schooling and are part of the workforce. Funds extended to these members include the long-established Harris Grant of \$5,000, given to support an ASOR-affiliated field project, and two newer fellowships. The first is the William G. Dever Archaeological Fellowship for Biblical Scholars, established in 2015 by annual contributions from an anonymous donor and awarded to a qualified American non-tenured faculty member in the field of biblical studies who wants to acquire elementary, first-hand experience in field archaeology and research in Israel.

The second newer fellowship – inaugurated just this year – are ASOR's Study of Collections Fellowships, which provide \$2,000 to recipients to support the study of collections, including museum and archival collections, repositories, or collections of national authorities. We received 15 applications for the two fellowships for which we had funding, but the selection committee was so impressed with the pool that its members helped us raise the funding for a third award. I am thrilled that this new fellowship opportunity is of such interest to our members and seems to fill a need in terms of their research.

Finally, we anticipate that next year, monies from a third new fund will come on board, the Joe Seger Excavation Fund. In this way, we address Strategic Goal #4 of the 2016-2020 ASOR Strategic Plan, "Increase the fellowships, grants, and other forms of support available to individual ASOR members and to the faculty, students, and staff of institutional member schools."

Publications. The 2016-2020 ASOR Strategic Plan also articulated – as Strategic Goal #2 – our intent to "enhance ASOR's monograph publishing program and develop new publishing venues appropriate to the twenty-first century." To this end, we have released a digital version of William Caraher, R. Scott Moore and David K. Pettegrew, *Pyla-Koutsopetria I: Archaeological Survey of an Ancient Coastal Town* (ASOR Archaeological Reports Series 21; 2014). This digital copy of the manuscript has been modified to include links to the archaeological data produced from 2003-2011 during almost a decade of intensive pedestrian survey and study by the Pyla-Koutsopetria Archaeological Project (PKAP). By integrating PKAP field and study data with *Pyla-Koutsopetria I*, the reader can now “drill down” into the data through hyperlinked text in

a pdf version of the book – "a great way," in the words of Chuck Jones, Chair of our Publications Committee, "to have the narrative engage with the full corpus of data it represents."

Overseas Ventures. Above, I have cited membership initiatives that – by making memberships for non-North American students and members from under-resourced regions more affordable – help further Strategic Goal #6 of the 2016-2020 ASOR Strategic Plan, which aims for the greater enfranchisement of ASOR's international members. Another such initiative, brought to ASOR by the Membership and Outreach Committee, speaks to the aspiration articulated in Strategic Goal #6 to bring the sort of scholarship showcased at ASOR's Annual Meeting to ASOR members outside North America. More specifically, Strategic Goal #6 of the 2016-2020 Strategic Plan suggested ASOR explore ways it might participate in international conferences and/or symposia, through, for example, ASOR's joining as a partner in symposia being planned by kindred organizations or through a symposium hosted by ASOR and one of ASOR's affiliated Overseas Research Centers.

To this end, the Membership and Outreach Committee brought to the Chairs Coordinating Council a preliminary proposal that ASOR affiliate itself with a one-day workshop on two Early Bronze Age sites in the southern Jordan valley (Tel es-Sultan and Tell Hammam) that is scheduled for June 2017 at the headquarters of the Whitaker Foundation in Palermo, Sicily. The Chairs Coordinating Council in turn discussed protocols for approving this and similar affiliations: (1) a vetting procedure for assuring that such workshops and symposia reflect ASOR's standards for academic quality and that such workshops and symposia adhere to the principles laid out in ASOR's Policy on Professional Conduct; (2) a requirement that such workshops and symposia be structured in such a way that they focus on a specific topic or theme and do not replicate the programming breadth of the Annual Meeting; (3) a requirement that such workshops and symposia be structured in such a way that they require no financial commitment from ASOR; and (4) a procedure for evaluating the benefits that accrue to ASOR in extending its sponsorship.

I anticipate that the Membership and Outreach Committee will submit a formal proposal to the CCC in May that ASOR affiliate itself with and be a sponsor of the June Palermo workshop (which is scheduled to take place in any case, even if ASOR is not involved), and I look forward to seeing the ways in which this sponsorship can enhance ASOR's international reach.

Media. I am extremely pleased that for this April 2017 Board meeting, we achieved what has been for me a long-standing goal: to create a Board Manual for ASOR. This Board Manual came about, in large part, because of the hard work of our Board Chair Richard Coffman, and for this, as for so many other things, we owe him our thanks.

I am also thrilled to report that after much hard work, the new ASOR website is to launch shortly. Here, we must extend particular thanks to our Executive Director, Andy Vaughn, who calmed down my Luddite self and throughout the website development process, talked me back down from the cliff more times than I can count. While I don't want to be

a part of a website design process ever again, I think we all can be extremely proud of the product we are creating and how well it presents ASOR to our members and to the wider world.

III. Concluding Reflections

As I hope the above discussions make clear, a lot has happened since my last report to the Board – much of it good: the astoundingly positive response to our Annual Meeting’s call for papers and to our new membership rates; the expanding reach of our fellowship programs; our new international initiatives; our snazzy new website; and even, despite the angst, the prospective renewal of our cooperative agreement with the US Department of State.

Still, the loss of our social media specialist and the unexpected news of our impending eviction, in mid-March, which came even as we were trying to accommodate the record number of Annual Meeting paper proposals, manage the influx of new memberships that came in because of the Annual Meeting and because of our new membership rates, build a new website, and evaluate an expanded pool of fellowship proposals, no doubt threw us for a loop.

On top of this, there has been much in the news recently to which we have felt compelled to respond: the travel bans put forward in the US Government’s Executive Orders of January 27, 2017, and March 6, 2017, and the proposed budget of the new administration, released March 16, 2017. This proposed budget would decimate parts of federal funding from which ASOR and its members have benefitted (the NEH, the NEA, and the Fulbright-Hays and Title VI programs funded by and administered through the Department of Education’s International Education Programs and the Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs).

For ASOR, in short, it’s been quite the ride these past few months! As always, I extend to all of you my deepest thanks for everything you do to make the journey easier and to support me, our staff, and all of ASOR’s good work in this, our 117th year.