



President's Report
ASOR Board of Trustees
April 21, 2018

I. ASOR's New Home. In my November 2017 President's Report, I noted that in the months leading up to our November Board meeting, "the issue of ASOR's new home had undoubtedly been a major item of business for me, our Executive Director, and others on our staff and on our Board." As the e-mails I sent to the Board on February 20 and March 5, 2018, no doubt made clear, the issue of ASOR's new home continues to be a major issue -- indeed, the major issue -- that I, our Executive Director, and others on our staff and Board are working to address.

The Board will remember from my February 20 and March 5 e-mails that several important developments occurred between our November Board meeting and the sending of those e-mails. First, and most important, the Executive Committee determined that for logistical reasons, we needed to make a firm decision about the location of ASOR's new home, where we will rent office space for the short term and, in the long-term, buy. After a site visit in February by three Executive Committee members and after assessing our fund-raising potential, the Executive Committee determined that ASOR should relocate to the Washington, D.C., area. Based on the advice of a Washington-based commercial realtor, we are currently focusing our attention on properties in Alexandria, VA. Alexandria has attracted our attention for three main reasons: (1) it is home to many other non-profit organizations; (2) it is an easy commute to downtown Washington, very near to the DCA airport, and houses an Amtrak station; and (3) our realtor has been able to show us several properties in Alexandria that are appropriate for our needs and within our price range. In the NEH grant proposal we are distributing in advance of the April 2018 Board meeting (see further below), there is information about some of the properties we have seen in Alexandria, although do please note that we are not necessarily proposing to purchase any one of these particular properties (and, indeed, none of them may be still on the market by

the time we are ready to buy). Rather, we share these materials so that the Board can get some sense of the Alexandria real-estate market and what it might offer.

Developments that have taken place since my March 5 e-mail include our applying for an Infrastructure and Capacity Building Challenge Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. If our application is successful, this grant would provide ASOR with up to \$500,000 from the NEH to purchase and equip permanent office space, to be matched by fund-raising (at a 3:1 ratio) on our part. We will hear the outcome in mid-August 2018. In the meantime, and as noted above, I am pleased to share our NEH application packet with you. I would like to thank our Executive Director, Andy Vaughn, for his hard work in pulling together the many parts of this grant application and getting us successfully (and ahead of time!) to the "submit" phase. In addition, thanks are owed to former NEH Program Officer and ASOR member Frederick Winter, ASOR Board Chair Richard Coffman, ASOR Vice-President Sharon Herbert, and ASOR Past President Tim Harrison, all of whom helped write and revise the biggest and most important section of the application, the narrative describing the significance of ASOR's contributions to humanities-based research and the ways NEH funds could significantly enhance our scholarly work.

Also, since I last wrote the Board, Andy Vaughn and I have made a second site visit to Alexandria, to meet again with our realtor and confirm that there are properties there appropriate to our needs and within our price range. In addition, during this visit, Andy and I looked at potential short-term rental space for ASOR, and we toured the office space and met with the Executive Director of the American Research Center in Egypt (ARCE), as ARCE -- one of ASOR's kindred non-profits and learned societies -- has recently relocated to Alexandria. We have, moreover, continued to receive lead pledges for our building fund campaign, and at this point, we have a total of \$316,000 committed (including two extraordinary six-figure gifts).

Finally, and most important, Andy has had several conversations with our Boston office staff about our plans and their future with ASOR. Although we will begin relocating to Alexandria in July 2018, we hope to retain our current Boston staff and continue running some of our operations out of Boston through December 31, 2018, for the sake of continuity and so that we might continue to benefit from our staff's significant expertise and long-term experience in managing different parts of our operation. In addition, we have offered our current staff the opportunity to move with us to the Washington, D.C., area, although right now, none of the long-term ASOR staff intends to pursue that possibility. There is some prospect, however, that ASOR's newest employee, Marta Ostovich, and the Assistant Director of ACOR and CAARI, China Shelton, will move with us to Alexandria. Also, as the Board knows from my e-mail of December 20, 2017, our longest-serving ASOR employee, Selma Omerefendic, who had been with ASOR for 17 years, transitioned to a full-time position in the Office of Post Grants Management at Boston University in January 2018. Fortunately, Selma is still working for ASOR as a part-time

contractor, and we are also fortunate that the former Assistant to the Executive Director Britta Abeln has assumed several of Selma's former responsibilities as she has stepped into a new role in the ASOR office as Financial Specialist.

Moving, I think we all know from experiences in our own lives, is bittersweet. There are profound feelings of sadness and loss that come with saying goodbye to our long-time Boston home and, more important, to our devoted Boston staff. Yet the decision to purchase a new and permanent home for ASOR in the Washington, D.C., area is an exciting one. ASOR's first office, established in 1900, was one large room in a Jerusalem hotel. During the succeeding 118 years, we have dramatically expanded our scholarly capacity and public outreach. A permanent home for ASOR is the logical next step for our organization. This office space will transform ASOR, taking us to a new level, as we work to dig deeper and deeper into the past to accomplish more and more in the future.

II. Publications Partner. A second issue that has occupied much of Andy's time and mine over the past several months is a potential ASOR contract with a Publications Partner, i.e., a publishing business (either non-profit or commercial) that would work with us on the production and marketing of ASOR journals. As Andy will discuss in the Executive Director's report, there were three main reasons we moved to consider such an arrangement. These are (in priority order) (1) we wanted to see if a publishing partner could help us meet our mission for publications (especially wide dissemination of our journals and better online access); (2) our institutional or library subscriptions have been decreasing, and JSTOR Current Scholarship Program [JSTOR CSP] has not been the answer we anticipated -- nor do we have the resources in terms of staff time and access to marketing opportunities to address this issue in-house; and (3) handling our publications program (especially fulfillment of journals) takes up a fair amount of office space, and yet securing and paying for this office space now that we have lost our complimentary office space at Boston University is a challenge.

In pursuing this possibility, Andy and I have worked closely with our Publications Committee to ensure that the Committee's input, and especially the input of the journal editors who are *ex officio* members of the Publications Committee, could be taken fully into account. We began by sharing with the Publications Committee both a memo from Andy, outlining in greater detail than I have above the reasons we were moved to consider a contract with a publishing partner, and a copy of the Request for Proposals (RFP) that we sent to presses we had identified as potential partners. We were able to have a preliminary discussion regarding these materials and regarding responses to our RFP with the Publications Committee at its November 2017 meeting in Boston. That discussion then continued over e-mail after the Boston meetings. The conversation was greatly enriched by the contributions of former Publications Committee member and publishing professional Mitch Allen, whom we hired as a consultant to help us draft our original RFP and to evaluate the proposals we received from potential publishing partners.

Ultimately, we received nine proposals, and the Publications Committee members were able to review these and also a summary memo and spreadsheet that Mitch Allen produced comparing potential publishing partners. The Board's Executive Committee also reviewed Mitch Allen's memo and summary spreadsheet at its January 27-28, 2018, meeting. Based on the input we heard from both the Publications and Executive Committees, Andy and I decided to seek revised and more substantive proposals from four presses: three non-profit university presses and one commercial press.

Andy and I have carefully evaluated those four revised proposals, and we also shared the revised and more substantive proposals with the Publications Committee. We were particularly pleased to be able report that all four of the finalist publishing partners agreed to the following points to ensure that we have a smooth transition: (1) that ASOR may retain Lockwood Press for all current functions/services pertaining to *JCS*; (2) that ASOR may retain Eisenbraun's for typesetting *BASOR*; (3) that ASOR may retain the current copyeditors for *BASOR* for at least two years; and (4) that ASOR may retain the current copyeditor for *NEA*. Some of the potential publishing partners also included other items in their proposals that would maintain continuity. In addition, the four finalists all agreed (1) that the way that JSTOR back content appears for users will not change; (2) that all revenue from JSTOR back content would come to ASOR; and (3) that ASOR will continue the ownership of the back content with JSTOR.

In the end, Andy and I agreed that our top choice among the four finalists was the University of Chicago Press (UCP), and the Publications Committee members, while not unanimous, overwhelmingly supported Chicago as well. We believe that Chicago, because it publishes the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies (JNES)*, understands some of the particular requirements of *BASOR* and *JCS*. Indeed, both Andy and Chuck Jones, the chair of the Publications Committee, spoke with the editor of *JNES* (Chris Woods), and he reported very positive things about working with UCP. Chuck has also reported that other feedback he has received about working with Chicago has been positive. Chicago, in addition, has the most ambitious marketing plan of our four finalists, and we believe that they can sell *BASOR* and *JCS* to new subscribers better than any other publisher.

Andy will have more to say about the specifics of our proposed contract with Chicago, and especially what we hope are the financial benefits of the proposed agreement. Here, I would only reiterate that while we hope there are financial advantages to joining together with a publishing partner, our primary aim is mission-driven: we are convinced a Publications Partner can help broaden the reach of our journals, through increased library subscriptions and enhanced online access, and thereby further the goal articulated in our mission statement to "disseminat[e] research results and conclusions in a timely manner, through a robust publication program, annual meeting, and other venues." We also look forward to reallocating the significant part of our staff's time currently given over to the

production and marketing of ASOR journals, in order to address other of the goals articulated in our mission statement and in our 2016-20 Strategic Plan.

We will be asking the Board to approve our entering into a Publishing Partner agreement with the University of Chicago Press at our April meeting. If the Board approves ASOR moving forward, I expect that Andy Vaughn (as ASOR Executive Director) will sign a binding five-year contract with UCP within a month after the Board Meeting.

III. ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives (CHI). Many members of the Board will remember that at the time of our April meeting in 2017, we were uncertain when we would actually receive the \$900,000 funding for what would be Year 3 of ASOR's cooperative agreement with the Department of State, to document, protect, and preserve the cultural heritage of Syria, northern Iraq, and (as of 2017) Libya. More specifically, although the Year 3 funding was to run from March 31, 2017, through March 31, 2018, we had not in fact received a grant to sign by the time of the Board meeting on April 29, 2017. It did come shortly thereafter, on May 2, 2017, and we thus began work on a grant that officially began on March 31, 2017, about a month late.

It is also the case that for Year 3, just over 10% (\$100,000) of the Department of State funding was directed to support in-country preservation and stabilization projects in Syria, Iraq, and Libya. This is a larger amount than in previous years, and it signals good news: that especially in northern Iraq, things have moved toward a post-conflict modality, where in-country mitigation and restoration are possible, and are a more urgent need than the documenting of cultural heritage degradation and destruction that was our priority when the conflict in northern Iraq was in full throttle. The bad news is that logistical problems have made it challenging to move forward with this stabilization work. For example, it has been impossible, due to multiple bureaucratic and in-country complications, for members of our CHI team to go to Iraq and sign a MOU with Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage. While our team has identified several preservation and stabilization projects that we might undertake, we are not permitted to use federal funding unless we have the formal agreement and partnership of the Iraqi government.

We have also had problems implementing stabilization projects in Libya. Here, the challenges concern the logistics of transferring monies into the country and exercising due diligence to ensure that no funds fall into the wrong hands. We have also faced delays because the State Department office based in Tunisia that has responsibility for Libya is understaffed. However, the situation is improving. ASOR has received approval for four stabilization projects to be carried out in Libya, and we are awaiting final approval from the State Department regarding the transfer of funds to support these projects. We also hopeful that three CHI team members (Michael Danti, Will Raynolds, and Andy Vaughn) will travel the World Monuments Fund Executive Vice President (and ASOR Board member)

Lisa Ackerman to Tunis and Benghazi in early May to meet with Libyan partners and discuss further preservation and stabilization projects.

I am also pleased to report that just two weeks ago, ASOR received approval from the State Department to transfer funds to a non-profit organization in Turkey to support stabilization efforts in northern Syria. Last week, ASOR transferred \$35,000 for the first round of work, and we hope that enough progress will be made so that a second round of \$30,000 may be transferred in late May or early June.

Nevertheless, all these in-country complications have meant that we did not/could not spend our entire \$900,000 State Department funding by the official "close" of Year 3, on March 31, 2018. We thus asked the State Department for -- and have been granted -- an extension of the grant period, which runs through June 30, 2018. Given the recent progress outlined above, we feel confident that we can complete our Year 3 work by June 30. We will also be submitting proposals for additional State Department funding, to continue our cooperative agreement after the current funding runs out. As this point, though, it appears most likely that additional funding from the State Department (if it is received at all) will focus more on monitoring, reporting, and fact-finding about damage to and destruction of cultural heritage sites and less on in-country stabilization projects. That said, the situation is fluid, and we will likely not know about continued funding until close to June 30, 2018.

Meanwhile, we are looking for more funding opportunities from private foundations, similar to the current funding of \$245,000 we have received from the Whiting Foundation to digitize cuneiform and medieval Islamic manuscripts in Mosul, the \$50,000 we have received from the Foundation of Jewish Heritage to work on an inventory of Jewish heritage sites in Syria and Iraq, and the \$190,000 in funding we have received together with the World Monuments Fund to work in Libya on geospatial mapping.

IV. Bylaws. As we contemplate major changes for ASOR in terms of our office location, our publications program, and (potentially) the funding sources for our CHI team, changes to the ASOR bylaws may seem a fairly mundane matter. Nevertheless, as I indicated to the Board in an e-mail on March 31, 2018, some revision of the ASOR bylaws has seemed to me an important yet also a challenging project, and I am grateful to our Board Chair, Richard Coffman, for spearheading this effort. In particular, Richard has sought (1) to clarify and tighten some ambiguous language in the current bylaws; (2) to address certain lacunae in the current bylaws; and (3) to emend parts of the current bylaws in order to reflect current ASOR governance practices or, in a few cases, to stipulate what we thought ideal governance practices should be.

In my e-mail of March 31, 2018, Richard and I presented our proposed revisions to you for your consideration and for discussion at the April Board meeting -- and I also thank the several of you who have sent comments already. Our plan for the Board meeting is to hear

more of your comments and suggestions and then re-revise. Our goal is to bring that revision back to the Board in November for ratification.

Please do note: as always, all changes to the bylaws are subject to the approval of the Board.

V. Fellowships. In February and March, we announced the recipients of the 2018 ASOR Grants and Fellowships, and I am very pleased to mark some special accomplishments associated with this year's grant and fellowship program. First, we awarded two new excavation grants this year -- the Denise L. Gold Excavation Grant and the Joe D. Seger Excavation Grant. Both of these grants are -- like the long-standing Charles Harris Excavation Grants -- awarded to a Principal Investigator of an ASOR-affiliated field project, and thereby triple (in one year!) the grant opportunities makes available to dig directors. In doing so, we address a goal that was articulated in both our 2011-2015 and 2016-2020 Strategic Plans: to fund grants to benefit dig directors' archaeological fieldwork.

We also continue, of course, to fund excavation fellowships to send students and others just beginning to be interested in archaeology to the Middle East to participate in fieldwork projects. I am especially pleased that this year, on the very first day of our March Fellowship Madness fund-raising campaign, we met our entire campaign goal, which was to raise money for two excavation fellowships beyond those we could already fund through our various fellowship endowments. Eventually, we raised enough funding to support 21 young excavators who will be joining fieldwork projects in the Middle East this summer.

VI. Sad Farewells. Every November, at the ASOR Members' Meeting, we mark with sadness the loss of ASOR members who have died in the previous year, and we remember those colleagues also at the November meeting of the Board. But there are times when we, as a Board, need to make special note of losses we have suffered. This April meeting is such an occasion, as we mourn the recent death (on March 23, 2018) of our long-time Board colleague and long-time Board Secretary Jim Strange. As I wrote Jim's widow, Carolyn, after his death, Jim was the perfect embodiment of all the *w's* we ask of Board members: work (all Jim's years as secretary); wisdom (Jim's deep-seated institutional memory); wit (with witticisms always delivered in Jim's delightfully laconic Texas drawl); and wealth (among the excavation fellowships we awarded this year was one funded by the Strange and Midkiff Families Excavation Fellowship fund, established in 2014 by lead gifts from Jim and Carolyn). We will miss Jim terribly.

We also extend our deepest sympathies to our Board Chair Emeritus, P. E. MacAllister, whose beloved wife Fran passed away on December 8, 2017.