



President's Report  
ASOR Board of Trustees  
November 17, 2018

Location, Location, Location

**Location, I: Saying Goodbye to Boston.** As the Board knows, we have been gradually winding down ASOR's presence in Boston. On June 30, 2018, we moved out of 650 Beacon Street (one of the two office spaces that we began renting in Kenmore Square on June 1, 2017, after being evicted from our long-time home at Boston University). With this move out of 650 Beacon Street, we consolidated our Boston operations in our second and smaller Kenmore Square office at 665 Beacon Street, which meant first and foremost that the three colleagues still on our Boston staff -- Britta Abeln, Inda Omerefendic, and Cynthia Rufo -- relocated from 650 to 665 Beacon Street. Also, our Board colleague Joe Greene, acting on behalf of the Harvard Semitic Museum, followed up on the action approved by the ASOR Board at its April 2018 meeting by moving the ASOR Archives, which had been housed at 650 Beacon Street, to Harvard. There, they remain under ASOR ownership, but in Harvard's custody.

At our 665 Beacon Street office, Britta Abeln serves as ASOR's Finance Specialist, a position she assumed in January 2018 after our long-time Financial Administrator and ASOR Assistant Director Selma Omerefendic left ASOR to assume a new position at Boston University. Inda Omerefendic serves as ASOR's Director of Membership and Publications, after having previously served as ASOR's Publications and Fulfillment Manager and as ASOR's Publications and Archives Assistant. Cynthia Rufo serves as Archivist and Website Manager.

We plan to keep the office at 665 Beacon Street open through December 31, 2018, when our lease there expires. At that point, we will say goodbye to Inda Omerefendic, who will be leaving ASOR after six years of extraordinary loyal and expert service. At the same time, our

Financial Specialist Britta Abeln will say goodbye to Boston, as she is moving to Los Angeles come January -- about as far away from Boston (and Boston weather) as one can get and still remain in the continental U.S. Yet even though Britta will be three time zones away, she has agreed to continue to work remotely on ASOR's behalf to make sure our financial record-keeping and the servicing of our financial obligations stay on track. Cynthia Rufo will also continue to work half-time for ASOR from her base in Boston, managing things such as regular website updates and the weekly publication of *The ANE Today*, as well as helping to support the work of ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives.

We are all deeply grieved to lose our day-to-day ties with these long-term and hard-working employees. As I wrote in my November 2017 President's Report, moving is hard, and there is no doubt that the hardest part of ASOR's move has been separating ourselves, first, from Selma, and now from Britta, Ina, and Cynthia. We will miss terribly their deep-seated expertise and their equally deep-seated loyalty to ASOR, and we cannot thank them enough for their efforts on ASOR's behalf over the years and the enormous contributions they have made to our organization. Britta and Ina will be in Denver, and I encourage you all to seek them out to extend in person our deepest thanks and wish them all the best as they and we move on.

**Location, II: Saying Hello to Alexandria.** A lot has been happening in our new home in Alexandria, VA. A fourth Boston colleague, Marta Ostovich, who just joined the Boston-based ASOR team in March 2018 as Office Assistant, has moved with us to Alexandria, where she has assumed a new position within ASOR: Manager of Programs. Also, China Shelton, who worked in the Boston ASOR office in support of ACOR's and CAARI's U.S. operations, has moved to our new home in Alexandria, to continue her work as the Assistant Director of ACOR and as the U.S. liaison for CAARI. We have also hired a new Membership Manager to work in our Alexandria, office, Felice Herman. Felice comes to us with a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology/Archaeology from Washington and Lee University and an MA in Archaeology from University College, Dublin, and she has participated in excavation projects and fieldwork schools in the UK, Ireland, Italy, and at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello. She also brings significant experience working with the membership and donor base of non-profits, including (most recently) a Washington, D.C.-based historical society. Felice will start her ASOR position full-time in December, but she will be in Denver to help out, so be sure to look for her and say hello there!

Not only are Marta and China resident in our current Alexandria offices (with Felice soon to join them); in August, our Executive Director Andy Vaughn and his family moved from Deer Isle, Maine, to their new home in Alexandria. I've talked to Andy by phone several times in Alexandria at the end of the day, when he's already gotten home, and I can report that I often hear the voices of his daughter's visiting school friends buzzing in the background -- and so I think it is fair to say that the Vaughns have really settled into their new digs and established themselves as a presence in their new community. We hope, of

course, that they will be happy and fulfilled in Alexandria and that this exciting new phase of ASOR's life is equally exciting for them.

In Alexandria, as the Board will remember, we are currently housed in temporary office space that has been provided to us by one of our institutional member schools, Virginia Theological Seminary. Andy, Marta, China, and (soon) Felice seem to have been comfortably accommodated in this office space at VTS; at least Andy reports that they have all been warmly welcomed and treated generously (including an invitation to join the VTS community for lunch in their dining hall every day!). Andy has also pitched in to do some substitute teaching at VTS for faculty who are on the road, and we are glad that ASOR is able to contribute in this way to the VTS community.

I must also report that the matter we discussed at length in our Board meeting last April -- VTS's plan to sell one of their three Assyrian reliefs -- did come to pass, and the relief sold at auction at Christie's on October 31, 2018, for approximately \$31 million. The identity of the buyer is unknown. There have been several articles in the press about the sale, including articles that registered criticism regarding VTS's decision to sell the relief. Three of the most interesting that I have seen are <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/a-record-setting-usd30-1m-sale-of-an-assyrian-relief-at-christie-s-raises-red-flags>; <https://www.npr.org/2018/11/04/663372633/record-setting-sale-of-an-ancient-assyrian-stone-relief-sparks-looting-fears-in>; and <https://hyperallergic.com/469108/31-million-sale-of-3000-year-old-assyrian-relief/>. You will see that ASOR members Patty Gerstenblith and McGuire Gibson are quoted in these pieces.

As for the reaction of other ASOR members: I did have a chance to discuss the impending sale of the relief with the CAARI Board in Nicosia in June and then with the ACOR Board a week or so later, in Amman. I have also discussed the sale with ASOR's Chairs Coordinating Council, and I encouraged the CCC to share the memo I wrote to them about the sale with their committee members. I think it is fair to say that while no ASOR member with whom I have spoken was happy to hear the news of the VTS sale, everyone appreciated that our Board had discussed the matter fully and thoroughly and weighed carefully the pros and cons of our temporary residency at VTS. I also, of course, appreciate the Board's thorough discussion, as my reports to CAARI, ACOR, and the CCC were greatly strengthened by my being able to present so many nuances regarding the Board's decision-making processes.

**Location, III: Putting Down Roots.** At VTS, we have been assigned two offices, and while the offices are comfortable and well-apportioned, Board members will notice -- if you are doing the math -- that with three full-time staff, we are already a little cramped. And, when Felice joins us in December, things will get cozier still. Our goal, then, of buying a building as a permanent home remains a top priority.

To this end, I have formed a Building Campaign Cabinet, whose inaugural meeting will take place in Denver. I am very pleased that our Board Chair Emeritus, P. E. MacAllister, has agreed to serve as the Honorary Chair of this Building Campaign Cabinet. P. E., as many of you may know, turned 100 on August 30, 2018, and it is remarkable -- and a remarkable indication of his great dedication to ASOR -- that P. E. is still willing to lend his hand to our efforts to move our organization forward.

I am also very pleased that our Vice President Sharon Herbert has agreed to serve as the Building Campaign Cabinet Chair, and I thank as well the other members who have already signed on: Lynn Swartz Dodd, Sheldon Fox, Carolyn Midkiff Strange, Ed Wright (*ex officio*) and Andy Vaughn (*ex officio*). I will also be a member of this cabinet. It has in addition been my pleasure to give the Building Campaign Cabinet what I hope is a very nice "starting out" present: the news that ASOR has already secured roughly \$625,000 in gifts and pledges toward the purchase of office space in Alexandria.

We also continue to work with our Washington, D.C.-based realtor to identify appropriate properties for our needs. Just recently, Andy was able to tour some of those properties with a prospective donor, and we remain confident that the right space, at the right price, will be there for us when the time comes to buy -- ideally, within the next six months.

**Location, IV: The Annual Meeting.** Some members of the Board may remember that at our meeting in Atlanta in 2015, I proposed to form an ad hoc committee to look at the issue of the time and place of the ASOR meeting and the viability of continuing to try to meet in the same city and in the same week as SBL. The nub of the problem is simple: the reunited AAR and SBL, and their convention management group, have essentially forced ASOR out of the centers of the cities where the meetings are being held. That meant we were in Buckhead in 2015, while AAR-SBL was in downtown Atlanta; we were in a suburban resort in San Antonio in 2016, while AAR-SBL was downtown; in 2017, we were at the waterfront Westin in Boston, while AAR-SBL was downtown at the Hynes Convention Center; and we're also a far ways from the AAR-SBL meeting in Denver in 2019.

The ad hoc committee that I formed was thus charged with looking at whether it was viable or realistic for ASOR to keep meeting -- or at least keep meeting year in and year out -- in the same city as SBL.

Unfortunately, this committee's work -- which was engaged with great vigor in 2016 -- languished to some degree beginning in 2017, largely because in March 2017, we got our eviction notice from Boston University and the process of relocating our administrative office side-tracked the discussion about the Annual Meeting. This delay proved to be less problematic than it could have been, as we have been able to contract good meeting space at good rates for both San Diego in 2019 and Boston in 2020 (at the same hotel as our record-breaking 2017 meeting). Thus, the urgent pressure to come to a decision about the

location of the Annual Meeting was relieved. But now it is time to re-engage in a discussion about the Annual Meeting's location, both about our meeting in 2021 (when AAR-SBL will be in San Antonio) and for the years beyond. Indeed, we have recently learned that AAR-SBL will be in San Antonio or Denver (the two most challenging AAR-SBL locations for us) five times between 2021 and 2031 (San Antonio in 2021, 2023, and 2029; Denver in 2022 and 2026).

To this end, we have scheduled an all-member discussion on Thursday of this year's Annual Meeting, from 12:45-2:00, to be held in conjunction with the annual Early Career Scholars' Panel. Open to all, this meeting will allow members to present their views and discuss the issues and options with the larger membership.

I encourage all Board members who are available to attend. Ultimately, the decision about when and where the ASOR Annual Meeting will be held will be made by the Board, and our decision for November 2021 must be made at our April 2019 Board meeting. In short, there is a lot at stake, and the more informed the Board can be about the members' preferences and opinions before our April 2019 meeting, the better the decision we will be able to reach.

**Location, V: The April 2019 Board Meeting.** Finally, regarding location, I must report with regret that unbeknownst to me, the Dartmouth Model UN is scheduled to meet in Hanover, NH, the same weekend (April 5-6) that I had hoped to host the Board on the Dartmouth campus. The Model UN has claimed every hotel room in (our small) town, and so -- unless Board members wish to pitch tents somewhere on my eight-acre property -- I must regretfully withdraw my invitation to host the Board in Hanover.

We will meet instead in ASOR's new home, in Alexandria, VA, so that the Board can see where we have settled and what our long-term prospects in this Washington, D.C., suburb will be. And I am still happy to host any of you individually at Dartmouth at any time: just say the word, and I will make it happen!

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November is always a time when we as a Board say goodbye to members who are ending their term of service. In particular, I want to say goodbye and express my gratitude to Jeff Blakeley, who is leaving our Board after serving as a Membership-elected Trustee, and B. W. Ruffner, who is leaving our Board after serving as a Board-elected Trustee. Both bring long records of service to ASOR and to our Board: Jeff served on the ASOR Board as interim Vice President for Publications in 2008, and shortly thereafter, he became Chair of the Publications Committee and represented the Publications Committee on the ASOR Board as Vice President for Publications until 2010. B. W. first joined the ASOR Board in 2001, and he served as the Board as ASOR Treasurer from 2003-2006. In July 2013, he

assumed the position of Chair of the ASOR Board and served with distinction through 2016. We will miss them both.

We also, this November, say goodbye in a way, to our current ASOR Secretary Lynn Swartz Dodd, whose six-year term of service is ending. Lynn, though, will remain on the Board as an Institutionally-elected Trustee, so, while we will lose her note-taking skills, we will not lose her! Congratulations also to current Membership-elected Trustee Ann-Marie Knoblauch, who on January 1, 2019, will assume the Secretary's post in Lynn's place.