

**INTERIM REPORT of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Annual Meeting (AHCotAM)
Presented to the ASOR Executive Committee, February 2019**

The AHCotAM Membership:

G. Arbino, Chair (2016-); K. Bramlett (2016-); W. Caraher (2016-), S. Crawford (2018-); E. Darby (2018-); K. Rubinson (2018-); E. Welch (2016-); L. Younger (2016-17). President S. Ackerman is the Supervisor.

The AHCotAM Charge:

The Committee was charged in 2016 by the ASOR Board with presenting a recommendation (or recommendations) to the ASOR Board regarding Annual Meeting logistics, in response to the SBL/AAR expansion of hotel bookings for their meetings. Between fall 2016 and January 2019 (with a hiatus spring 2017-fall 2018) the AHCotAM has been involved in data collection. To date, there have been no discussions regarding possible recommendations at the Committee level; these will take place after the results of the 2019 Membership Survey have been compiled. The AHCotAM Recommendation will be available to the ASOR Board prior to their April 2019 Meeting.

This Interim Report seeks to list and summarize the data collected thus far. No attempt at synthesis will be made here.

1. Annual Meeting Attendance Data – 2009-2018

	2009: New Orleans	2010: Atlanta / Buckhead	2011	2012	2013	2014: Balt	2015: Atl	2016: San Antonio / La Quinta	2017: Boston	2018: Denver
ASOR Membership	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	1775	
Total Registrants to ASOR AM	601	685	816	921	928	936	877 (+25%)	881	1148	810
Percentage of total ASOR members registered for the AM									64.6%	
ASOR members who also have SBL membership (Dual Membership)									Ca 586 (33% total ASOR members)	
Number of total ASOR AM registrants who have dual ASOR and SBL memberships									198/1148 (= 17.2% ASOR AM registrants)	
Number of ASOR members (who also hold SBL memships) who registered for BOTH meetings	110	137						131	161/198	

Number of Dual Membership holders who registered for the ASOR AM only									37/198 (198 – 161 = 37)	
Dual Meeting Registrants as % of total ASOR AM Registrations	18% 110/601	20% 137/685						14.8% 131/ ca 881	14% 161/ 1148	
ASOR members who also hold SBL memberships who registered for the SBL Meeting ONLY									160 (9% Total ASOR membership @ 1775)	

Note: Some of the specific numbers were tabulated by SBL staff and may not represent accurate figures by ASOR measurements, but these are all we have in terms of comparative data. The percentages should be regarded as reasonably accurate.

In 2017 (Boston – ASOR was close to SBL) abnormally high attendance:

586/1775 (33%) of ASOR members also had SBL Memberships (Dual Members).

358/586 (61%) of ASOR Members holding SBL memberships registered for one or both Annual Meetings. This percentage is close to the number of ASOR members who attended the ASOR AM (64%) but significantly larger than the number of SBL members who attended the SBL AM (49%).

198/358 (55%) of Dual Membership attendees (= 198/586, 34% total Dual Members) chose to attend the ASOR AM (18% total ASOR AM reg).

Of this **161/198 (81%) registered for both** - this was 15% of the total AM registration.

And **37/198 chose ASOR ONLY** (19% of Dual Member attendees = 37/586 = 6.3% of total Dual Members).

321/358 (90%) of Dual Membership attendees (= 321/586 -55% of total Dual Members = 17% total ASOR members) attended SBL either alone or with ASOR

160/358 (45%) of Dual Membership attendees (= 160/586 -27% of total Dual Members) chose SBL AM over ASOR AM.

Summary of 2107 data:

33% of total ASOR Members are also Members of SBL

20% (358/1775) of total ASOR Members are Dual Members who attend an Annual Meeting (ASOR, SBL, or both)

18% (321/1775) of total ASOR Members are committed to attending the SBL Annual Meeting

8-9% of total ASOR Members already have chosen SBL AM over ASOR AM

64% of total ASOR Members attend the ASOR Annual Meeting

2. Annual Meeting Program Data: 2010-2018

The AHCotAM undertook to examine the nature of the Program in terms of the sessions' relationships to Biblical Studies. While admittedly somewhat subjective, the same standard was applied to each year, so the trends are reliable. The resulting data show that the "Bible-ness" of Program Sessions decreased in 2010 and 2011 and has remained fairly constant since. Data prior to 2010 were not run, thus it is unknown if the decrease is the end of a slide or the totality of the decrease or the back half of a "blip" in the data.

These data were prepared by W. Caraher and E. Darby; the spreadsheet evaluates every session of every AM for the covered years.

I. Methods

The available annual programs (2010-2013, 2015-2018) were evaluated on a session-by-session basis by Bill Caraher on a rating system from 3-0, what we affectionately call, the "Bible-ness Rating."

- 0: Not Bible-y. E.g. Hellenistic Cyprus or Neolithic Sudan
- 1: Possibly Bible-y, but not explicitly so. E.g. various panels on the Near East or Anatolia
- 2: Rather Bible-y involving periods and places typically associated with Biblical archaeology. E.g. Excavations at Megiddo or various "Tell" sites
- 3: Festschrifts, excavations at places associated with Biblical figures

A graded rating system was chosen to better mirror the complex ways content of interest to scholars in SBL-related fields has been incorporated in the program.

The results of this tabulation can be found in the Excel spreadsheet.

The program from 2017 was then evaluated independently by Erin Darby on a paper-by-paper basis to assess (1) whether a paper-by-paper rating would produce results that confirmed the session-by-session analysis; (2) whether a Syro-Palestinian archaeologist who also works in the field of Biblical Studies would produce a comparable rating.

The results of this test can be found in the Excel spreadsheet. They suggest that the two systems are sufficiently similar to confirm that the large-scale session-by-session approach used by Caraher is reliable. Differences in the data can be explained by (1) the different professional backgrounds of the analysts (though note the final results did not differ that significantly) and (2) individual papers in thematic sessions could receive a higher or lower rating than an overall session title suggests.

In general, it is likely that a Syro-Palestinian archaeologist would produce higher ratings, though not substantially so; if anything, the Caraher figures may slightly underestimate the amount of content relevant to scholars of biblical literature. For the purposes of the foregoing multi-year analysis, the Caraher figures are a helpful starting point for discussion.

II. Results

Figure 1 illustrates the Caraher data, which was originally organized by conference day (Thursday, Friday, Saturday; see Excel spreadsheet). Figure 2 (dependent on Table 1) is based on the average Bible content rating by year (combing the original Thursday, Friday, Saturday data into total rating per year).

Figure 2 shows that content related to biblical literature did decrease slightly from 2010-2012 and has since remained fairly consistent.

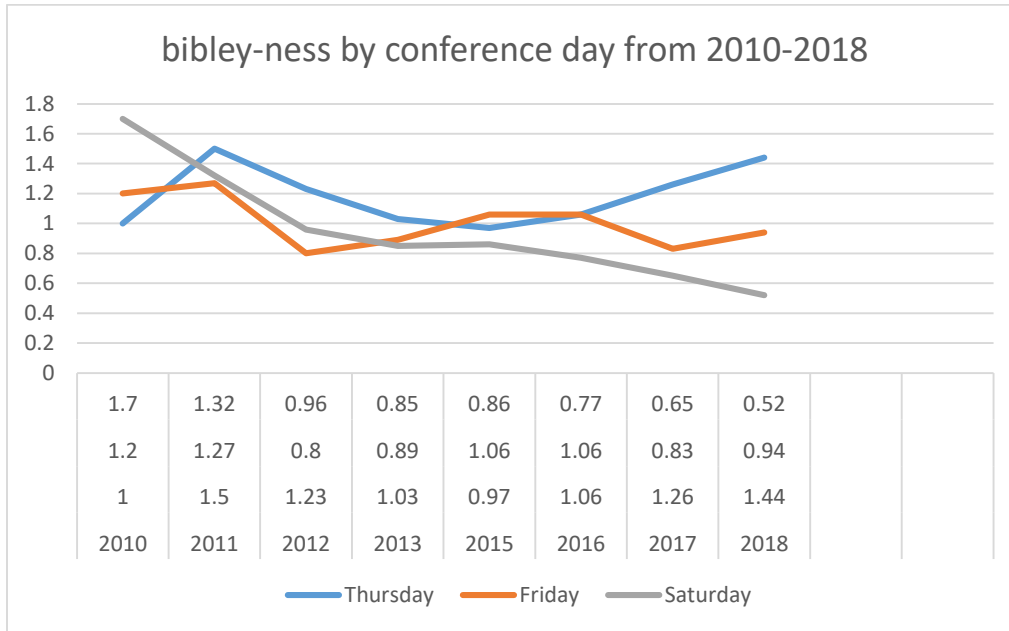


Figure 1: Caraher average bible-ness rating per ASOR sessions at Annual Meeting from 2010-2018 (excluding 2014), arranged by conference day (see Excel spreadsheet for data)

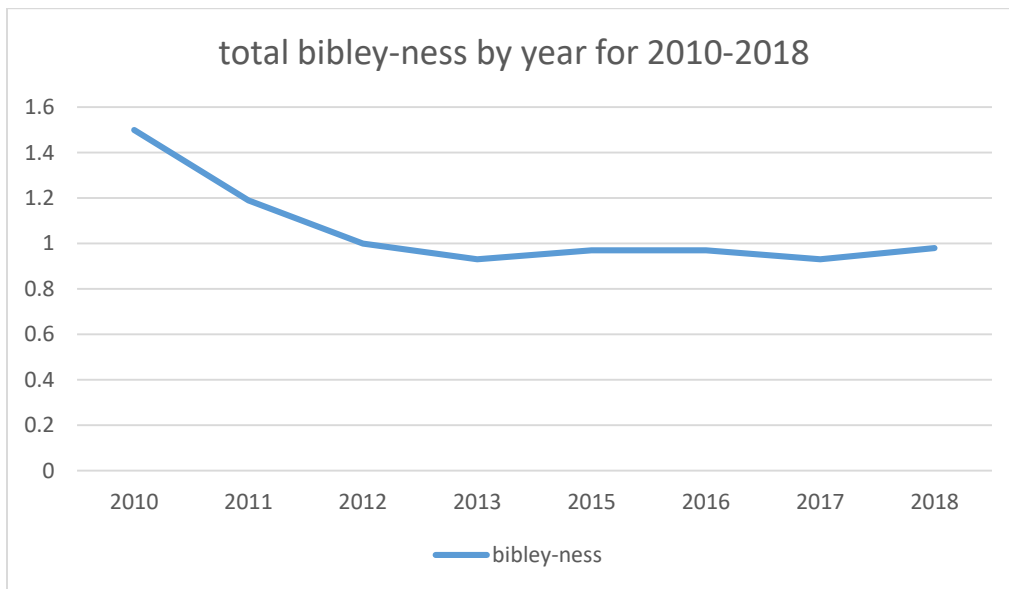


Figure 2: Caraher average bible-ness rating of ASOR Annual Meeting from 2010-2018 (excluding 2014), arranged by year (see Table 1 for data)

Table 1: Caraher average bibley-ness rating by year from 2010-2018 (excluding 2014) for the ASOR Annual Meeting (based on Excel spread sheet)

ASOR Conference year	Caraher bibley-ness rating on scale 0-3	Number of sessions	Avg. bibley-ness rating
2010	88	59	1.5
2011	93	78	1.19
2012	88	88	1
2013	79	85	.93
2015	89	92	.97
2016	92	95	.97
2017	111	119	.93
2018	99	101	.98

Figures 3 and 4 reconfigure the data to examine what percentage of session received a 3, 2, 1, and 0 over the course of 2010-2018 (see Table 2). Arranging the data in this way allows us to subdivide the averages noted in the Excel spreadsheet, Fig. 1-2, and Table 1.

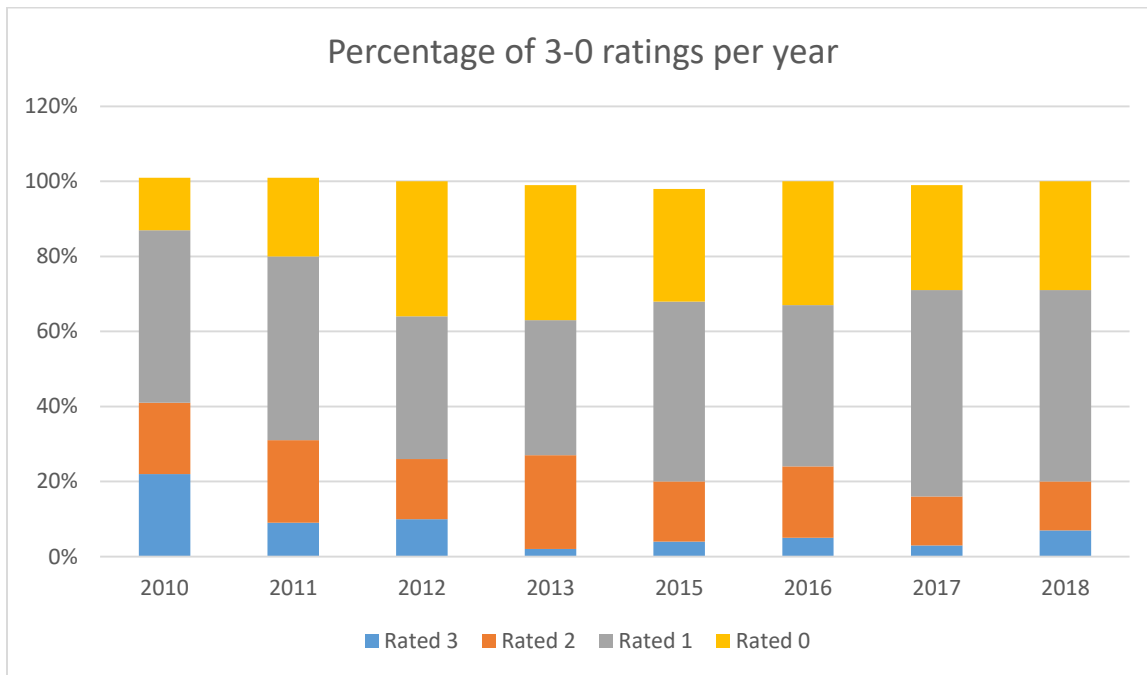


Figure 3: Rating on Caraher Bibley-ness Index from 2010-2018 (excluding 2014). See Table 2 for data

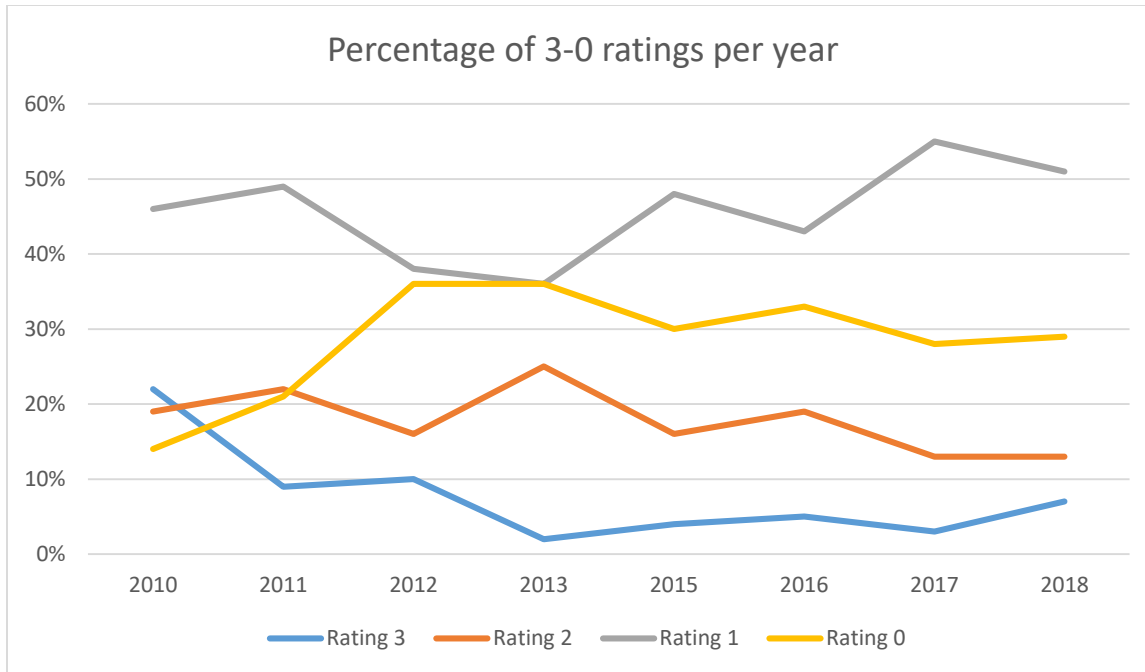


Figure 4: Rating on Caraher Bible-ness Index from 2010-2018 (excluding 2014). See Table 2 for data

Table 2: Caraher bible-ness rating per session by # and % from 2010-2018 (excluding 2014) based on Excel spreadsheet

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2015	2016	2017	2018
# and % of sessions rated a 3	13/59 22%	7/78 9%	9/88 10%	2/85 2%	5/92 4%	5/95 5%	4/119 3%	7/101 7%
# and % of sessions rated a 2	11/59 19%	17/78 22%	14/88 16%	21/85 25%	15/92 16%	18/95 19%	16/119 13%	13/101 13%
# and % of sessions rated a 1	27/59 46%	38/78 49%	33/88 38%	31/85 36%	44/92 48%	41/95 43%	66/119 55%	52/101 51%
# and % of sessions rated a 0	8/59 14%	16/78 21%	32/88 36%	31/85 36%	28/92 30%	31/95 33%	33/119 28%	29/101 29%

Figure 3 shows the shift in percentages of Category 3-0 sessions in the Annual Meeting program, while Figure 4 demonstrates the trajectory of each of these ratings over time. Both demonstrate that Category-3 sessions decreased significantly from 2010-2012 (confirming the data in Figs. 1-2) and have constituted a lower percentage of the program since. It is of note that within this new, lower percentage of the program, Category-3 sessions wax and wane in various years. Category-3 sessions show no sign of continuing to decrease, but rather increased slightly overall from 2013-2018.

Category-2 sessions do not show a long-term decline. They wax and wane, sometimes significantly, from year to year with no clear empirical pattern.

Category-1 sessions have also varied from year to year. Beginning in 2012, they seem to have increased gradually, occupying more of the Annual Meeting program. Category-1 sessions have always been the largest percentage of the meetings, even as far back as 2010.

Corresponding to the decrease in Category 3-sessions, Category 0-sessions increased from 2010-2012. Since that time they have either remained consistent or decreased slightly, particularly from 2013-2018.

When taken together, Figure 2 demonstrates that Category 3-1 sessions still make up the largest percentage of Annual Meeting program space. If Categories 3 and 2 are isolated, their combined percentage of the Annual Meeting has decreased from 2010-2018; but they seem to have stabilized since 2012, averaging ca. 20% of the yearly program.

While it could be argued that Category-0 sessions would be relatively unaffected by a loss of members to SBL, it is more difficult to anticipate how such a loss could impact Category-1 sessions, which are of interest to scholars of biblical literature as well as scholars of areas unrelated to SBL. Category-2 and 3 sessions would certainly be impacted by any possible loss of membership or decreased attendance at the Annual Meeting.

3. 2016 Membership Survey

In the 2016 Membership Survey we received about 240 responses (about 12% of the membership; 2/3 of respondents regularly attend the Annual Meeting and about ½ of respondents had been members of ASOR 10 years or less). The results showed that 25% of respondents said they prefer to meet with SBL, while 33% preferred to not meet with SBL (42% were in the middle). Other questions were asked regarding the dates and days of the meeting and whether ASOR should try and meet with another learned society. For most, a change in the November date (59%) or days of the week (71%) would make NO difference to their attendance. Most respondents were ambivalent about ASOR meeting conjointly, but of those giving a preference for the second organization, 71% chose AIA.

Many of these same questions are being asked on the 2019 Membership Survey and a comparison may be instructive for the committee.

4. November 2018 Straw Poll

Roughly 9% of total attendees in Denver responded (120 responses) –these also provided comments at the Members forum. The Chair has not yet received the official minutes of the Forum, so these are not provided here.

Please rank 1-4 (1 being strongest agreement)		Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4
Stay with SBL		45	14	11	36
Prefer to meet as close as possible to SBL	15				
Prefer to meet in the same city but earlier days (Tuesday-Friday)	35				
No preference	13				
Split from SBL in terms of city but not dates		9	22	35	16
Prefer far from SBL city	5				
Prefer close enough to SBL city	23				
No preference	20				
Split from SBL (both city and dates)		44	14	12	20
Prefer to meet with another group/society	19				
Prefer to meet alone	16				
No preference	22				
Alternating Years. In Manageable years STAY with SBL (city and dates) AND in unavailable years SPLIT from SBL in terms of city, but not in terms of dates		20	32	30	7
Far from SBL	7				
"Close enough" to SBL	26				
No preference	19				

Of those who wanted to stay with SBL (both city and date), the second most popular option was alternating years and meeting "close enough" to SBL. Generally, those who ranked the first option (stay with SBL) the highest also ranked the third option (total split) the lowest. These people also had the fewest comments. They also tended to vote only ranking the first option as highest and leaving the rest of the survey blank.

Of those who ranked the second option highest (Split from SBL in terms of city but not dates), the first option (stay with SBL) was ranked the lowest. These people also wanted to split to a different city, but generally had no preference whether that city was near or far to SBL city.

Those who rated the third option (full split) the highest tended to vote the first option (stay with SBL) the lowest. Even though they ranked staying with SBL low, they would prefer earlier days of the week if ASOR stayed with SBL. They were also interested in meeting with another group/society and had a number of comments.

Those who rated the alternating year option the highest were all over the place in terms of what their second choice would be and/or which option they considered the worst.

5. Annual Meeting Post-Meeting Evaluation Survey Data: 2013-2018

Looking specifically at the question “What factors influenced your decision to attend the Annual Meeting” it is clear that over the course of the past 5 years the vast majority of respondents selected “Dates of the Meeting” and/or “Location of the Meeting”. About 150 responded each year between 2013-2016 with the number dropping to about 120 in 2017 and 2018. Although difficult to be exact (because of multiple answers possible) those giving date and location as a factor ran between 70 and 80% for the period. Those responding they “Always attend” or attended because of “Previous attendance” ran about 30% for the period while “Program Content” usually reached only about 5-10%.

6. 2018 Comments Request: Overseas Directors

Of the three Directors, the one that felt that a change in Annual Meetings would most affect their constituency was **Matt of the Albright**.

1. Because the AIAR Board meets with people who attend either or both ASOR and SBL meetings, difficulties would likely result if the Board meetings could not overlap both meetings, both in attendance and membership/recruitment on the Board. Because of economics, the Director would likely need to choose to attend whichever meeting the Board chose to meet.

2. Middle Eastern (and possibly other international) attendance would be less if scholars needed to choose between meetings.

3. “The Albright promotes cross-fertilization between texts and archaeology. Some of my proudest moments as Director are when a biblical scholar tells me that they learned so much about archaeology by being a part of our multidisciplinary group of fellows and when an archaeologist expresses a new appreciation for texts for the same reason. I hear this a lot. To me the temporal and spatial relationship between the ASOR and SBL meetings in its current configuration allows for this same cross-fertilization to happen at these meetings. What a tragedy to see that severed, forcing some to choose one conference over the other.”

4. If a split occurs and SBL then beefs up its archaeology offerings, more ASOR members may choose to attend SBL.

Barbara at ACOR:

“SBL is irrelevant to me and most of my colleagues.” November dates are good (and should remain consistent), and Saturday is likely important to keep (for folks who have weekday jobs). City and hotel: “best deal” is preferred – economics is an issue for international attendees.

Lindy at CAARI:

“In terms of the archaeological view, I do not believe that Cypriot archaeologists feel a close relationship with SBL but of course there are a minority of biblical scholars who work on Cyprus who do have an interest in remaining close.... I get the sense that people would like to keep the date as it is convenient [and already ‘set’ in calendars] for all but do very much resent being pushed to the outskirts of cities when SBL take all the hotel spaces. So, ... take the alternating years option, keep the dates as is but move to a different city when logistics require (I don’t think that being in an adjacent city helps, I think that if it is a different city then people would just prefer convenient travel choices) [the chosen city should ideally be a travel hub with lots of cheap connections].”

7. 2018/19 Comments Request: Exhibitors, Vendors, & Booksellers

Six vendors responded to a wide email request for their views on possible ASOR meeting modifications. This request included a list of the options presented at the 2018 Members Forum and Straw Poll. Of these six respondents, five said a change would make no difference to their exhibiting at the ASOR meeting. The other, speaking somewhat as an attending ASOR member, preferred alternating years, if it came to a change. One noted that an overlap of dates with SBL is inconvenient. One noted a preference for the November dates, while another suggested meeting with AAA.

8. 2108/19 Comments Requests by the Chair: “Representative” Constituents

As Chair, Arbino took the liberty of soliciting input from various people that he felt either had well thought out positions or could unofficially represent certain ASOR sub-groups. Several, but not all, responded.

A few **Israelis** were contacted and respondents noted that there were different groups of “Israelis”.

1. Many of the ASOR attendees come from the IAA. These folks are allowed to apply for travel grants every other year (people that are more senior, publish a lot, or have a really special project that the IAA wants to publicize will generally be approved), and some allow their membership to lapse in the alternating years (apparently not uncommon among the ASOR membership in general – membership is dropped when not attending). Many/most of these are not members of SBL, so a change in date or meeting partner will likely not be relevant for them.

2. University connected academics comprise the second – and smaller? – group. “Were ASOR to split from SBL you might lose a few Israeli scholars, on a meeting-to-meeting basis. No one would stay away from ASOR on principle. Rather it would be contingent upon the location of the meeting and the session(s) offered. We would only lose some of the people doing Iron Age archaeology that has a biblical research component. Prehistoric, Bronze Age and even classical period scholars and students do not go to SBL. Same for those who deal with archaeological sciences and theoretical archaeology, for the most part.” One university academic strongly argued for maintaining connection to the SBL meetings, agreeing with the suggestion to move the meeting days to avoid overlap.

Generally, most Israelis prefer to travel to a convenient but “interesting” venue city with additional attractions, and some/many stay extra days to add to their trip.

In addition, one correspondent suggested alternating the ASOR AM with the ICAANE meetings to provide more international access on an every-other-year basis. He suggested bolstering the regional ASOR meetings to fill the resulting North American void.

Editor’s Note: It should be noted that arriving at solid numbers for “Israeli” attendance at the AM is currently not possible. While it may be possible to search the Programs for institutional affiliation of Presenters, and this would give a minimum number of those from Israeli schools and the Rashut, it might not provide the full picture (it would not necessarily provide data about membership in SBL). That said, if only about 15% of ASOR AM attendees are also members of SBL (see data above), and the AM runs about 900 on average, then Israeli academics holding two memberships (and their students) can comprise no more than 135 attendees – likely somewhat less than half that number at a maximum, considering the other known sub-groups (Baptists, Adventists, Evangelicals, those holding positions in Departments of Religion, Judaic Studies, and Biblical Studies, etc). So the number of Israeli academics holding ASOR and SBL membership and attending the AM in any given year is likely between 25 and 50.

Because **Adventists** have played a prominent role in ASOR, the Chair decided to solicit input from some in that group (as well as having an Adventist faculty member on the AHCotAM).

Although there are a few subsets of “Adventists” (West Coast/Eastern; undergrad/graduate) all seem to agree that the connection to the SBL will always be strong for this ASOR sub-group, and that given the need to choose, many would choose the SBL meeting over the ASOR one – as a place to present archaeological findings to an audience that can benefit from them in a broader sense.

NOTE: the Chair polled himself regarding Southern Baptists (and their 6 seminaries, several are institutional members) and found a similar result, noting that many have already moved to SBL only.

Because the issue of **moving the date to Spring** has always come up, the Chair solicited input from a longstanding proponent.

The argument (made very cogently) is made that we are no longer “Bible connected” as we once and traditionally were. Thus the continued connection to SBL for a small percentage of ASOR membership is not warranted (other professional groups may be more appropriate to our current membership). But since there is a small but significant group of ASOR+SBL members who continue to attend the AM, we should not conflict with the SBL meetings. This would necessitate – for those who can only afford one meeting a semester – a move to spring semester. April is the best month (even if there would need to be yearly adjustments to avoid conflict with mobile religious holidays) considering weather, the possibility for staff meetings prior to upcoming field seasons, and allowing for a Spring ASOR Board meeting. It may also allow for a joint meeting with AOS, ARCE, etc. (meeting alone is good too). In addition, spring allows for the results of the previous summer to be better prepared for presentation. Finally, this move may open up “smaller towns and cities” as venues, rather than expensive larger ones.

At their December 2019 meeting, the **ASOR CCC** discussed the issue.

Comments ranged from those excited that an expansion of the soul of ASOR could be made by a split to those whose students move between the two meetings and thus would be forced to choose. It was noted that the larger donors to ASOR tended to be “Bible connected” [the Chair has not verified this, but it seems logical, given that older members tend to be more well off and older members tend to be long-term members thus statistically more likely to be “Bible connected”]. Issues related to the host city’s attractions (specifically “colleges” and “museums”) were noted as important. Days of the week were also discussed with notice that starting on Tuesday may be problematic and that a Thursday- Sunday slot could be cheaper. One comment expressed the idea that a split from SBL would mean a gain in membership from MESA and AAA [the mechanics of this were not explained, but likely owing to the similar dates, assuming ASOR moves its dates?]. Finally, the idea was floated regarding an experimental period – splitting for a year or two and evaluating. This may not be feasible given some modification options and the needs of those signing the hotels.

It should be noted by the Chair here: As recorded, some responses indicated that membership and meeting data were not always clearly understood by members of the CCC (something the Chair has found to be much too common among ASOR membership he has had contact with).

The Chair also asked the **current President of the AIA** to weigh in.

Very detailed responses were sent in. The Chair will present here bullet points:

- No discussions have been made with AIA about joining with them
- The AIA/SCS outcome should prove instructive for ASOR – cross-talk is healthy
- Back to back meetings is costly and prolonged; many can only afford 1-2 professional meetings a year, especially grad students and junior colleagues
- SBL’s Placement Services is valuable to ASOR members who teach in Departments of Religion and Biblical Studies; even if it has become less of a factor due to the internet (e.g. conducting preliminary interviews via Skype)
- “... anyone working outside of Biblical Archaeology (e.g. paleobotany, prehistory, whatever) attends the relevant professional meetings where there are job markets (e.g. AAA, etc).”
- “It is in our best interest – and that of the future of the field – to demonstrate archaeology’s relevance and importance to [SBL]. They are the ones who formulate job descriptions and are in control of hiring new faculty. We want them to be aware of the value of including archaeology in their department’s curriculum and having faculty who can offer courses in archaeology. By separating from SBL, ASOR effectively lowered archaeology’s profile in the context of Religious and Biblical Studies, removing itself from the picture.”
- ASOR’s insistence on having its own hotel may be a “foolish decision” with a “disappointing outcome”.
- “I believe it is in the best interests of a majority of ASOR’s members, and the future of the field in general, to rejoin SBL. I urge ASOR to find a way to make this happen.”

Finally, it should be noted that some respondents (international and North American) were particularly keen to discuss **the host city** – especially regarding attractions, restaurants, and the hotel being downtown (where the action is).

REPORT SUMMARY:

From the above it can be seen that no clear trend emerges, and that the AHCotAM will have much to consider as it formulates its Recommendation to the Board. Data, opinions, and (often conflicting) personal desires. While we await the results of the current (2019) Membership Survey, it is unlikely that those will provide any clearer way forward. What is clear is that ASOR is at a crossroads in its history, marked here by a broadening (divergence?) in its membership's interests and opinions. The Annual Meeting continues to be a defining aspect of ASOR, and, although internally we have dealt with expansion and inclusion, we now face a challenge from an external force regarding what the shape of the AM will be moving forward.