

June Report to Membership posted online: (<http://www.asor.org/news/2020/06/name-survey-report>)

Background

The Ad Hoc Committee on ASOR's Name was appointed by outgoing President Susan Ackerman and incoming President Sharon Herbert at the beginning of January, 2020. Its members include Trustees Randy Helm (chair), Emily Bonney, Lisa Ackerman, and Eric Welch, and members Eric Cline, Emily Hammer, and Kiersten Neumann. The charge to the committee is included as [Attachment 1](#).

Process

Shortly after its membership was confirmed, Chair Helm distributed to the committee study documents relevant to past discussions of ASOR's name. A list of these documents is included as [Attachment 2](#).

The Committee met four times by Zoom between January 21 and April 22, 2020. After reviewing the materials and discussing the issues, we agreed on a work plan that would (a) assess the possible impact of a name change on the ability to access ASOR publications in the future; and (b) develop a survey that would provide a sense of ASOR members' views on this question. The subcommittee on publications quickly determined that any impact of a name change on access to publications would be negligible. The survey subcommittee developed an instrument for the committee's review.

With the assistance of ASOR staff, the survey was made available online to all ASOR members from March 18 – March 28. We received a very healthy response rate of approximately 30 percent. Comparing the demographics of survey respondents to the actual demographics of ASOR's membership, we noted an overrepresentation of members who have belonged to ASOR for ten or more years (42.6% of respondents v. 29.7% of members). While we agreed that this was worth noting, we also agreed that the robust response made the survey results a reliable guide to members' views on the issue of the organization's name.

Survey Results ([Attachment 3](#))

Demographics

Survey Respondents skew younger: 56.3% are younger than 55; 43.7% are older than 54. However, we don't have age data for all ASOR members, so we don't know if this is representative.

Areas of Consensus

- 70.3% agree or strongly agree that it is important that the society's name reflects the geographical scope of ASOR's work. Only 15% disagree or strongly disagree.

- 55.9% of respondents agree or strongly agree that it is important that the name reflects the chronological scope of ASOR's work. Only 25.6% disagree or strongly disagree that this is important.

N.B. The current name does not communicate either the geographical or chronological scope of ASOR's work.

Areas of Disagreement

1. Keep the name "American Schools of Oriental Research?"
 - 45.3% agree or strongly agree
 - 40.9% disagree or strongly disagree
 - 13.8% undecided
2. Eliminate the name, but keep the acronym ASOR?
 - Approximately half of respondents (50.1%) disagree or strongly disagree
 - A minority (32.2%) agree or strongly agree.
 - Undecided = 17.7% (somewhat more than are undecided about keeping the historical name).
3. Create a new name retrofitted to the ASOR acronym?
 - 41.6% disagree or strongly disagree;
 - 34.2% agree or strongly agree;

Observation: Enthusiasm for a retrofitted name is a popular option for members under 35 years old, but drops off sharply among respondents older than 35 and members for more than ten years.

4. Create an entirely new name that is descriptive in nature (e.g. "Society for Ancient Studies")?
 - 41.9% have a poor or very poor impression;
 - 35.6% have a good or very good impression.
 - 22.5% are neutral.

Observation: No age group had a majority approving this option; support dropped off sharply among members of more than 10 years

5. Create an entirely new name based on an ancient word or concept (e.g. "Amphora")?
 - 48% have a poor or very poor impression;
 - 25.6% have a good or very good impression;
 - 26.4% are neutral.

Observation: This would seem to be the least popular option. No age group had a majority approving this option; support dropped off sharply among members of more than 10 years.

6. Create a new name that is a new acronym (e.g. “Archaeological Research and Cultural Heritage Education” – ARCHE)?
 - 42.2% have a poor or very poor impression;
 - 33% have a good or very good impression;
 - 24.8% are neutral.

Viable Options

The Committee discussed these results in some detail, noting that older respondents favor retaining the full name and younger respondents favor a change. We acknowledged that the younger respondents represent the future of the organization, while the older respondents represent a group with deep loyalty to and knowledge of the organization.

We also discussed the difficulties that the current name and acronym create for younger scholars in terms of the publication and service records in their tenure and promotion dossiers. Neither the full name nor the acronym explains the organization's purpose or work. Dossier readers outside the field are unlikely to understand the organization's relevance or importance.

While the option of a new descriptive name that yields an acronym failed to find majority support among any age group, almost half of the younger members liked it, with stronger disapproval showing up as the age of members increased. We considered the possibility that this option could address the consensus on geographical and chronological descriptors in the name, and make it easier to explain to dossier-readers, younger scholars, and others.

We also noted that keeping the acronym ASOR as the only name of the organization might, even with a descriptive tagline, result in increasing confusion about the name's meaning and the organization's purpose over the passage of time. Some committee members felt that this would result in another committee needing to consider the name issue a few years down the road.

ASOR Board Discussion

Committee Member Trustees Ackerman, Bonney, Helm, and Welch provided the ASOR Board with an interim report at its May 14th meeting. While no straw polls were requested or taken, Board members generally agreed that the most productive option would seem to be to come up with a new name that is descriptive of our work and creates an acronym (either a new one, or one that comes close to the present one).

Next Steps

The Committee agreed that this is a suitable moment to seek the membership's reaction to the survey results and the proposed course of action. Our preliminary assessment of possible names/acronyms yielded the following top five choices:

1. Society for Archaeology, Philology, and History of the Middle East (SAPHME)
2. Association for Archaeological Research and Cultural Heritage Education (AARCHE)
3. Society for Ancient Near Eastern Research (SANER)
4. Association for Archaeology, Research, Cultural Heritage, and Education (AARCHE)
5. Society for Archaeology, Philology, and History of the Ancient Near East (SAPHANE)

Two options inspired enthusiastic responses but few votes and received honorable mention as “beautiful losers:”

International Society for Ancient Near Eastern Research (INSANER)

Society for Middle Eastern Research and Social History (SMERSH)

Your Ideas?

We now solicit feedback on the above listed possibilities, as well as new suggestions from all members for a name/acronym that describes our organization’s geographical, chronological, and methodological scope.

Click here to vote for your preferred name or offer your own suggestions up until July 15, 2020.

Because of the uncertainty of the format of the Fall meeting and the fullness of its schedule (if it happens), the Ad Hoc Committee agrees that this interim report – and our request for feedback – will eliminate the need for an open forum in November. Our hope is to process feedback and suggestions, and suggest naming options to the ASOR Board of Trustees in November.

Click here for a PDF of this report.