

ASOR President's Report December 2020

As you all know far too well, 2020 has been a year of extraordinary challenge and change for ASOR along with the rest of the world. I am happy to report that ASOR, thanks to the Herculean work of our staff and the dedication of our membership, has risen to the challenges and effected changes that not only allow us to survive the pandemic but also to expand some of our programs in important ways. We leave 2020 stronger on many fronts than we began—stronger in numbers of members, stronger financially, and stronger in outreach. Andy Vaughn, who has guided us through this difficult year with steady and visionary leadership, has outlined our efforts in detail in his Executive Director's Report, and the reports from our Standing Committees testify to the innovative work of our members. These leave me with little to add, but much to applaud. That said, I will highlight here progress on three initiatives—ASOR's name change, our DEI efforts, and the development of Virtual Annual Meeting formats.

The Name

As you know from the Board's 2020 spring meeting and two subsequent special meetings on the topic, this was the year that we set ourselves to confront problems with ASOR's name and to determine whether and in what ways we should change it to better reflect what we do and to remove offensive language. After receiving the final report from the ad hoc committee charged with this task, you voted to put two choices before the membership in November, both of which preserve the acronym ASOR—American SCHOOLS of OVERSEAS Research vs American SOCIETY of OVERSEAS Research. American SOCIETY of OVERSEAS Research was the clear winner by a vote of roughly 2/3 to 1/3, and we are now moving forward with the legal steps to change the name in our articles of incorporation. This name is a compromise, and like all compromises it pleases no one completely. It can be called vague to the point of anodyne, but it allows us to grow and change in any number of now unforeseen ways without having to go through legal hoops in our articles of incorporation in the future. More specific descriptions of what we do can be captured in a tag line that we may change as ASOR changes without further legal paperwork. Our current tag line is “unearthing the past since 1900”. The ad hoc committee suggested something that describes our geographical reach—one of the few things the membership agreed needed to be in a new name. The committee's recommendation was “from Africa to the Indus Valley.” We will be working with our branding company to devise something that includes both these elements.

DEI

The Task Force, chaired by Erin Darby, is up and running as of November. Their charge is to seek out methods and recommend programs through which ASOR can recruit and support BIPOC members. This is not a simple task. The pool is shallow. Recent studies show African Americans make up only 1.5% of recent Ph.Ds. in Archaeology. Our related disciplines of Classics and Middle Eastern Studies produced a dismal 0% in recent years. Clearly, we must make major efforts to interest young pre-College students in our work. The Task Force has set itself four intermediary goals: 1. Identify partners in in community organizations and institutions; 2. Create fundraising initiatives for scholarships that promote BIPOC at meetings and in the field; 3. Recommend sensitivity training programs for ASOR leadership; 4. Collaborate with all

ASOR committees, leadership, and membership to identify needs and integrate these objectives across all areas of our new strategic plan.

Virtual Annual Meeting

The first two initiatives were planned 2020 goals; this one was thrust upon us by the pandemic. As you have read in Andy's and the Program Committee's reports and, I hope, experienced personally, our first VAM was a resounding success. This is thanks to astounding initiative and effort by our staff, our Program Committee, and our participating members. Although the virtual format is not without its downsides (mostly financial and social), it is clear that even when in person meetings become possible again some virtual events will need to be incorporated with them. The expanded participation is just too advantageous to our members and ASOR as an organization to forego. Hence our nascent plans, outlined in Andy's and the PC's reports, for a two-platform meeting in 2021. The ways to do this are many. We will need to plan and to experiment. The combined experience and wisdom of the Board of Trustees will be essential to this process. I have made this a major agenda item for this meeting and have invited the PC chairs to lead and participate in that discussion.

In closing, I repeat the good news: ASOR is healthy, financially and intellectually, and moving forward on many fronts. The standing committees of the CCC are contributing toward a new/revised strategic plan and incorporating all this in consultation with the EC. I plan to bring you a draft in our spring meeting. There are disappointments; 2020 was unhappily a summer without excavations, and 2021 is shaping up to be more of the same. The Committee on Archaeological Policy has repurposed our excavation fellowships to publication projects to deal with this. We have good reason to believe our excavation programs will emerge from this hiatus refreshed and stronger. As I look forward to 2021, I envision a year of progress and renewal. None of this is possible without the contributions of our members and especially the work of our Board of Trustees. I thank you.