

Assessment and Recommendation on the LCP from Andy Vaughn

Background: In the summer of 2016, Susan Ackerman and I held conversations with Andrea Berlin about ASOR being involved with the Levantine Ceramics Project (LCP). Subsequently, in October 2016, the EC voted unanimously for ASOR to be a sponsor of the LCP on a 5-year trial basis. The original proposal from Andrea and the relevant pages from the minutes from October 2016 EC meeting are included in the Board packet. I was a strong supporter of the original proposal, and I remain impressed with the LCP.

As outlined in the minutes from 2016, the EC determined:

that funds can be found within our current budget for an initial five-year period during which ASOR could agree to house the project, but not to curate it in perpetuity at this stage, and during which ASOR could develop this partnership and assess how or whether other partnerships and affiliations might be possible with other projects.

Current budget situation (in 2021): The budget situation has changed since 2016. At that time, ASOR was receiving over \$150,000 per year of indirect funds from the Department of State, and ASOR was housed rent-free at Boston University (Andrea's home institution). Today, ASOR's budget is not supported with indirect funding from large grants, and we will have office costs that exceed those that we were incurring in 2016 until the Board-designated Building Fund is fully funded at \$500,000 (I estimate at least three more years). We have operated at a near break-even levels in Fiscal Years 2020 and 2021, but we would have had a substantial shortfall if not for \$237,000 in two (forgivable) PPP Loans.

It is thus my assessment that budget support for the LCP during the next 3+ years (without designated gifts, designated revenue, or the use of surplus from prior years) could limit the use of unrestricted funds for other programs. Of course, receiving designated gifts or other forms of designated revenue, and/or using surplus funds from previous years are options. However, the situation has changed from 2016 when I was able to advise the EC that ASOR had budget funds to cover the \$10,000 per year of support from its annual operating budget without impacting other strategic priorities or other current ASOR programs.

Academic and research value: To be clear, and as noted already above, I do not mean, in presenting these budgetary concerns, to raise doubts about the academic and research value of the LCP. Andrea's report shows clearly that the LCP is a valuable research tool. The LCP platform benefits an important subset of ASOR's members, and ceramics are certainly central to ASOR's historical and current mission.

Another concern: is the LCP an ASOR publication? When ASOR took on the LCP for a five-year trial in 2016, part of our thinking was that ASOR might become the permanent home for, and administrator of, the LCP. Yet, efforts to integrate the LCP into ASOR have only been realized partially. Even though we identify the LCP as an ASOR publication on our website, and even though Andrea (as LCP editor) is a member of the ASOR Publications Committee, the LCP's branding does not clearly identify the platform as an ASOR publication. The ASOR Logo is found in the bottom, right-hand corner of the LCP website, where it is stated that "The LCP a project of ASOR." However, ASOR is not mentioned in the "About the LCP" webpage, nor was I able to find ASOR mentioned on any sub-pages on which I clicked (I tried 17 pages). Further, when I looked through the "legal" matter on the LCP website, ASOR was not mentioned in the following places: a) Instructions (for users and contributors); b) glossary; c) about the LCP; d) privacy policy; e) terms of service; or f) contact. I might also add that ASOR is absent from summary paragraph at the top of LCP

homepage, nor is ASOR mentioned in the excellent and high-quality video describing the LCP (ASOR is listed as a sponsor at the end along with other institutions who are thanked).

I do not make these observations as a criticism per se—or a as a complaint that ASOR is not mentioned. Indeed, according to Andrea’s report to the EC, ASOR contributes only \$10,000 out of \$60,000 to \$70,000 the annual expenses. Further, these expenses do not include all of the time that Andrea donates to the project as a volunteer. I am not sure that ASOR deserves to be listed as an “owner” of the LCP, or that the LCP website should identify itself as an ASOR publication. My observation is that the LCP website (and I think most users) do not identify the LCP as primarily an ASOR publication in the same way that *Ancient Near East Today*, ASOR journals, or the *Archaeological Report Series* are identified as ASOR publications.

Percentage of LCP contributors who are ASOR members: As I consider the question of using unrestricted (non-designated) budget dollars to support a research project, I try to think about the number and percentages of ASOR members involved. Unlike other ASOR publications that require membership in ASOR for all editors and editorial board members, there are numerous people who are not ASOR members on the LCP editorial boards and among LCP contributors.

- 21% of LCP Contributors (90 out of 422) are ASOR members
- 33% (1 out of 3) of the LCP Editors are ASOR members
- 50% (5 out of 10) of the LCP Editorial Advisory Board are ASOR members
- 57% (8 out of 14) of the LCP Country Editors are ASOR members

It is important to recognize that many of the LCP editorial leaders are active ASOR members, including sustaining members. Some of the editorial leaders are among ASOR’s most generous donors—including some of our most generous lifetime donors.

Summary: In addition to recognizing the significant research value of the LCP platform, this is a very difficult recommendation for me because Andrea Berlin is one of ASOR’s most committed and generous members. Sharon Herbert, ASOR’s President, is on the LCP Editorial Board.

At the same time, I feel that my job as Executive Director is to provide ASOR officers, the EC, and Board with my assessments and recommendations. ASOR has a number of other initiatives that are not currently funded with unrestricted (or non-designated) dollars. These initiatives include cultural heritage, diversity fellowships, and membership grants and scholarships. As our budget report indicates, ASOR books have required more support from the Opportunity Fund and from unrestricted surplus funds than in past years. ASOR is also facing revenue uncertainty as we emerge from the global pandemic, and the revenues and costs for the Annual Meeting going forward are not clear.

In light of these factors, I feel compelled to recommend to the EC that ASOR continue a relationship with the LCP with the understanding that we (ASOR and Andrea) will work together to raise designated funds to support ASOR’s participation in the LCP. I recommend that ASOR not commit financial support above what we are able to secure in designated dollars.