

Area 2: Cultural Heritage

Our Goals: Participate energetically in efforts to protect, preserve, and present to the public all aspects of the cultural heritage of SW Asia and the Greater Mediterranean Basin and to promote engagement with and understanding of the cultural heritage.

Background

ASOR has always recognized that the protection and preservation of the cultural heritage of its region(s) of study is at the core of its mission and an area of profound interest to its membership. In recent years our active involvement in preservation and education efforts has increased dramatically. Beginning in 2014 ASOR started to work with grants from the US Department of State to address the safeguarding of heritage sites, quickly accelerating past the original modest goals for funding. From 2014-2018, ASOR doubled its staff to work within the priorities of the US DOS large grant programs. ASOR enlisted into its projects volunteers from within and beyond its membership in the US, Europe, Middle East, and North Africa. With DOS funding ASOR teams monitored the condition of cultural heritage sites in Iraq and Syria and assisted in planning and implementing post-conflict recovery. Again, with aid from the DOS, ASOR was able to organize workshops, both at the Annual Meetings and in countries in the SW Mediterranean and especially in North Africa, to counter illicit antiquities trafficking and to advance understanding of cultural heritage, education and stewardship, especially for children. It also raised funds to bring overseas ASOR cultural heritage workers to the Annual Meeting.

ASOR plans to continue to participate energetically in efforts to protect, preserve, and present to the public all aspects of the cultural heritage of SW Asia and the Greater Mediterranean Basin and to promote engagement with and understanding of cultural heritage. ASOR aims to help carry out transformative work in cultural heritage through local members of the archaeological, conservation, museological, and touristic communities. Building on our core educational strengths we plan to continue these efforts in the following ways:

Actions

2A. Protect and Preserve Cultural Heritage

ASOR through its Cultural Heritage Initiatives Program, with the oversight of its Cultural Heritage Committee, will continue to participate in small-scale governmental and non-governmental projects to protect and preserve endangered sites, provided such projects are appropriate, effective, financially viable, and can be managed within the resource structure of the organization. While the funding efforts need to be initiated by ASOR, we commit to working with the local communities in the affected areas in order to have the best results. ASOR also commits to encourage complementary initiatives and efforts by its members. We currently fund a small number of preservation projects through the Shepard Urgent Action Grants, inaugurated in April 2020. With the Shepard funds we are able to award two to four grants ranging from \$2,500 to \$10,000 to excavation projects to carry

out emergency conservation or stabilization activities at archaeological sites. Our first such project was the successful stabilization of the Tabira gate at Ashur in collaboration with a team from the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani. We believe ASOR has the expertise to award and oversee more of these programs. We will seek funds from private and governmental sources to sponsor more of such projects.

2B. Promote Heritage Education, Documentation, and Presentation

Educational efforts to our North American membership are a crucial part of the goal to help protect and preserve cultural heritage. ASOR seeks to use its membership together with host-country facilities and contacts to develop resources and programs for site preservation, documentation, and presentation. ASOR commits to promote activities to encourage public engagement with, and advocacy for, the cultural heritage of the regions where we work. We envision these efforts to engage several constituencies. For instance, museums provide important resources for the preservation of cultural heritage and particularly effective venues for raising public awareness of cultural heritage. ASOR will strive to learn from and contribute to the museum programming of its constituencies. In addition, ASOR will work with local and regional government and non-government agencies, and local communities to ensure the preservation of cultural heritage sites and their utilization as sources of information about cultural heritage for local, national, and international constituencies. Over the past two years we have sponsored, with funds from the US DOS ambassadors' program, successful education projects in Libya, including suitcase museum programs at Tripoli, Gadames, and Derj. We will work to expand such community affiliated projects in North Africa beyond Libya and elsewhere.