ASOR Program Committee Annual Report 2022
Allison Thomason and Helen Dixon, Co-chairs, Program Committee
Arlene Press, ASOR Director of Meetings and Events

2021-2 was another rewarding and challenging year for the Program Committee (PC) in terms of planning and executing two academic meetings, and shifting the timelines for future meetings (e.g., invitations for future plenary speakers). We also consulted on and made program changes related to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and sustainability work happening across ASOR committees.

2022 Annual Meeting Planning and Scheduling

In late 2021, the Program Committee recommended another dual annual meeting, with a virtual and in-person component. After some discussion in the PC, and with Arlene Press (Director of Meetings), Andy Vaughn (Executive Director), and Sharon Herbert (President), it was decided to hold the Virtual Annual Meeting before the in-person one, as December was found to be very hectic for most attendees in 2021. In the spirit of experimentation in the Covid era, and a desire to test/pilot different virtual components, it was decided to hold the 2022 VAM again on the OpenWater platform but October 19-23, 2022 (Thurs-Sunday, 10 am – 3 pm EDT), therefore before the in-person traditionally scheduled component. Feedback to and within the PC indicated a "burnout" feeling for many attendees at the 2021 December VAM. We surmised that the October dates were perhaps more convenient and would not compete with end-of-semester and holiday events. The format would be same as last VAM, with pre-recorded 20-minute papers and 1-hour time slots for discussions for sessions, as well as two-hour workshops and live short presentations. After several rounds of discussion, the PC and co-chairs, in consultation with the CCC decided not to have a plenary event at the October VAM. This was due to difficulty in configuring a format/speaker(s) that would complement but not overshadow the in-person plenary. All Standing ASOR sessions would be held both in October at the VAM and in November in Boston; MOS proposers could indicate whether they wished for their sessions to be held virtual-only, in-person only, or both. In the end, the number of virtual time slots capped out at 64 (MOS + ASOR, some sessions used two time slots).

The new VAM dates proved to be both rewarding and challenging. The deadline to upload the prerecorded paper videos was Sept. 23, 2022, which was very early for some ASOR presenters who were accustomed to later paper preparation deadlines (e.g. November). As a result, several presenters asked for short extensions to upload, and others withdrew their virtual papers. Some papers were still being uploaded the day or so before the start of the VAM. This switching and collapsing caused some intensive time and email-based labor for ASOR staff and PC Co-chairs in September and October, but still less than 2021 when presenters were switching formats entirely. Arlene Press and Jared Koller handled most of these last minute changes with fairness, flexibility, and resourcefulness—finding creative solutions to allow as many presentations as possible in the VAM.

Fortunately, approximately 80% of the sessions went on as planned, with a few collapsing into others or with three papers/presenters. The attendance patterns were similar to 2021, with a total of 450 attendees. Most attendees participated in only one session, while a smaller percentage attended two or more sessions. This indicates that attendees had less time to

spend in the discussions and/or did not have time to view pre-recorded materials, so did not attend many sessions—especially on Saturday and Sunday. The latter also resulted in higher average attendance at workshops where pre-recorded viewing was not necessary. Most VAM sessions had 15-25 participants, including chairs and speakers, which is a healthy number to allow excellent dialogue and conversation. Chairs have become adept at running the Zoom meetings, allowing much time for discussion rather than just recap. The chairs of sessions were tremendously helped by the ASOR staff and, new this year, student fellowship recipients as technological facilitators.

The wonderful positive news of the VAM in October was the robust and increased participation of scholars from the MENA regions, along with the added feature of 20 hours of simultaneous Arabic interpretation (with one hour of Farsi). This excellent showing and format (thanks to ASOR internal as well as other external funding) allowed many scholars who cannot attend ASOR's in-person meeting to participate and share research. Several sessions saw many conversations between Arabic-speaking participants from Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Libya, Tunisia, and Morocco, as well as many colleagues from Europe, Canada, and even Australia. Clearly the virtual format continues to support ASOR's strategic plan of enhancing extra-north American participation in the AM and increasing equitable access to participation. For this reason alone, the virtual component is an important new feature of the AM.

The in-person meeting would continue in the same format and time frame as is traditional for ASOR, Nov. 16-19, with the Boston Park Plaza secured as a venue. Dr. Solange Ashby accepted ASOR's request to be the plenary speaker; she will speak on her recent research on Nubian queens, thus also enhancing ASOR's recent inclusion of Nile Valley materials south of Egypt. Currently, the number of sessions is 107, which is on par with previous pre-Covid in-person AMs and with previous AM in Boston. ASOR leadership has also opted to hold an apres-plenary reception, in a return to an ASOR tradition. As the immediate and dangerous threat of the Covid pandemic has subsided somewhat (in terms of hospitalizations and cases), vaccinations will not be required to attend, but masks will be required in indoor events unless speaking, responding or actively eating/drinking.

Poster Session:

The Program Committee, led by Sarah Wenner (PC member and Posters Chair), also allowed both in-person or virtual poster participation for the 2022 annual meeting. Poster submissions could be digital in PDF format, or in the traditional large-scale printed format for in-person presenters. ASOR will have both the physical posters displayed throughout the in-person conference and perhaps a digital portal to allow access to virtual-only posters. A poster session Q&A with all authors present takes place at lunchtime on Saturday in Boston. After the experiences of the virtual poster sessions in 2021, we opted again for a new format in order to ensure the most efficient and individualized use of presenters' and attendees' time. For the virtual component, where Open Water created an online "Poster Gallery," poster presenters were grouped thematically into 5 different breakout rooms and attendees could join the breakouts of their choice to ask questions after they visited the main session "room". Many attendees were far more familiar with the Zoom breakout format as compared to last year.

Other Events and Offerings:

As in 2020-21, in addition to hosting the plenaries, pre-recorded paper presentations, and posters, OpenWater will also host the recordings of the live discussions in paper and poster sessions and workshops on their server for at least 6 months after the conference, to allow attendees with registered passwords to view the sessions even after the days of the conference in October-November 2022. This allows ASOR and the PC to "extend" the meeting virtually into the near future. In addition, with presenters' and chairs' consent, some recordings of live virtual meeting sessions may be made available to the wider public (no password required) on the YouTube channel, ASORTV.

Most business meetings return to the in-person format for Boston, with ASOR providing lunches and breakfasts at many of the meetings in the hotel. The ASOR Book Awards and Service Awards will be presented as usual during the annual members' meeting in-person, with pre-recorded announcements, which will then be uploaded to the OpenWater platform and ASORtv for attendees to view after November. A new Cultural Heritage award is being offered for the first time this year.

Finally, because the location of Boston for the in-person component was chosen in part due to museums of interest to ASOR members, we are delighted that the Harvard Museum of the Ancient Near East is hosting a Saturday evening event in Cambridge (with attendees pre-registering for free, but providing their own transportation to the event). Other Harvard University Museums and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts will also provide free admission to any of their buildings with ASOR AM badge. We thank Gojko Barjomovic, PC member, for his initiative and help in organizing this splendid event. In addition, many of the familiar extra-program events are returning to Boston, including: affiliated society receptions; ECS brown bag and a new ECS welcome space and speed-networking event; and the Initiative on the Status of Women meeting and mentoring lunch, and others.

Sustainability Efforts:

For the in-person VAM, as with the 2021 meeting, ASOR will only print a limited number of hard-copy program books, for those who specially request them (per ASOR communication to all attendees). There will be a very limited number of printed books available in person at the meeting, as we feel that attendees are familiar by now with virtual formats and the AM app.

Happily, ASOR will still provide the sustainable and much-loved tote bags for participants and plenty of maps of conference areas in the Boston hotel for convenience! Finally, the PC will continue to schedule in-person AMs in travel-friendly hubs with related cultural interest sites, and hope to continue shifting to dissemination of information and schedules through PDFs/online apps/OpenWater. In 2022, the ad hoc committee on sustainability was formed and conducted a members survey, with questions about the AM format. As a PC, we will shortly analyze the data and discuss the implications of the survey results. Helen Dixon, PC co-chair, serves as a representative of the Program Committee in these conversations.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Initiatives:

The PC voted last year to continue the practice of eliminating the second line of institutional affiliation on name-tags at the in-person annual meeting (exhibitors excluded) reflecting our complex discussion of equity issues and balancing that with expectations of members around networking. Though we had opinions on all sides, the Program Committee ultimately hopes that

attendees will ask questions and deepen conversations about where others are coming from, allowing participants to discuss their affiliations on their own terms and offering more equitable footing, without relying on labels or inviting some to screen for prestigious institutions.

ASOR's Board of Trustees and Executive Director have also worked tirelessly to develop scholarship funds to eliminate or reduce registration fees for all attendees who wish to attend, and to particularly target and support those from BIPOC communities, who have been under-represented at the annual meeting and in ASOR's membership ranks. This resulted in 171 registration fees paid by ASOR scholarship funds or external sources for any participant who requested assistance (many from the MENA regions received them, including 61 Arabic speakers).

The PC also worked with the ECS Committee to create a more welcoming atmosphere at the in-person AM for DEI attendees, many of whom are also EC Scholars. At the in-person meeting in Boston, the ECS will have a welcome desk next to ASOR registration as well as a dedicated communal lounge space for ECS members to relax, meet, work, etc. The PC also added a DEI-related question to its Session Chair post-session surveys to help gather information about the atmosphere and culture at the AM.

In its meetings, the PC continues to discuss ways that ASOR could augment a climate of inclusion of diverse participants across all of its programs, events, and policies. ASOR's PC strongly supports this mission and will work with ASOR's standing DEI committee to increase such participation in all aspects of the Annual Meeting. One issue that will be discussed includes the institutional affiliation and geographic terminology references for institutions/sites in occupied regions or areas of conflict. This is an issue that has been raised by ASOR members related to inclusivity and a culture of welcome and will be addressed by other ASOR committees, including COP and Publications. Hopefully a new more precise and helpful general ASOR policy will arise to guide the PC here. The PC has also discussed whether ASOR should require/strongly encourage an initial template slide with ASOR professional conduct and policy language related to DEI for all session chairs to display at beginning of session (much like the template slides for the VAM).

Planning for AM 2023 and future years:

Planning for Chicago 2023 is just getting underway. For 2023, ASOR will meet in-person in Chicago once again. Very recently, the PC voted to continue with a virtual component for 2023 meeting, to be held in October with live papers given in two-hour session blocks (rather than pre-recorded papers with a one-hour in-depth discussion). More information on this is forthcoming. The 2023 call for MO Session and Workshop Proposals will be open December 15 and close January 15. The 2023 call for papers will be open February 15 - March 15.

 In our in-person PC meeting in Boston, we will discuss the future of the virtual annual meeting given the constraints we have been given (that it must take place in either October or December of the corresponding in-person meeting). The datapoints we will discuss include process of planning/scheduling/re-homing papers and videos for the 2022 VAM; cancellation of paper rate after acceptance; registration and attendance at sessions/workshops during the 2022 VAM and data from member preferences for meeting timing and format gleaned from the recent Climate Impact Committee survey. We will also discuss the timing/date of the VAM component

as well as format (e.g. limited synchronous vs. pre-recorded papers). The experimentation continues here.

On another planning note for 2023, at the request of the President and the CCC, the PC had a special meeting in May 2022 to recommend a list of potential plenary speakers for 2023. This is 1.5 years in advance of the in-person plenary and gives both ASOR and speakers more time to plan. The PC forwarded an unranked list of potential speakers, and a speaker was chosen by the CCC and has accepted the invitation. Previously the plenary discussion had occurred in January, therefore only 10 months before the in-person AM. This was not an extra burden for the PC and we see it continuing as a practice.

Special Note of Thanks to Helen Dixon, PC Co-Chair 2016-22
It is with poignant sadness and deep gratitude that we thank Helen Dixon for her six years of service as Co-Chair of the PC. Helen has carefully, passionately, and compassionately guided the PC and moved it into a new era, attracting through open calls many new engaged and active members from diverse fields, including EC scholars and those interested in diversity, cultural heritage, and equity and inclusion, along with ASOR's traditional archaeological fields. We will miss Helen tremendously and hope she receives much respite from the demands of being the PC Co-Chair. We will endeavor to continue her initiatives and passion as the PC forges ahead.

Respectfully submitted,
Allison Thomason and Helen Dixon
on behalf of the Program Committee

2020 ASOR Program Committee membership:
Helen Dixon, co-chair (PC member 2016, chair 2017-2022)
Allison Thomason, co-chair (2019-2022)
Gojko Barjamovic (2018-2023)
Hanan Charaf (2020-2022)
Debra Foran (2020-2022)
Jennifer Gates-Foster (2018-2023)
Felix Hofflmayer (2022-2024)
Kate Larson (2020-2022)
Scott Moore (2019-2024)
Kiersten Neumann (member 2020-2022; with your approval, co-chair of the Program Committee 2022-
    2025)
Madadh Richey (2021-2023)
Sarah Wenner, Poster chair (2020-2022)