

Executive Director's Report November 2022, Board Meeting

I have divided my Fall Executive Director's Report into three sections so that I might share observations and make recommendations for the Board to consider as you plan for how ASOR will emerge from the COVID pandemic and how the organization that you oversee might reach new heights and thrive in the second quarter of the 21st century. ASOR will celebrate 125 years in 2025, and ASOR will move into the second quarter of the 21st century—both milestones provide an opportunity for you to think about how ASOR can continue being a great international organization that thrives and truly changes the world for the better. There are many challenges, and need has never been greater for ASOR to play a major role in meeting these challenges.

The following is the structure of my report:

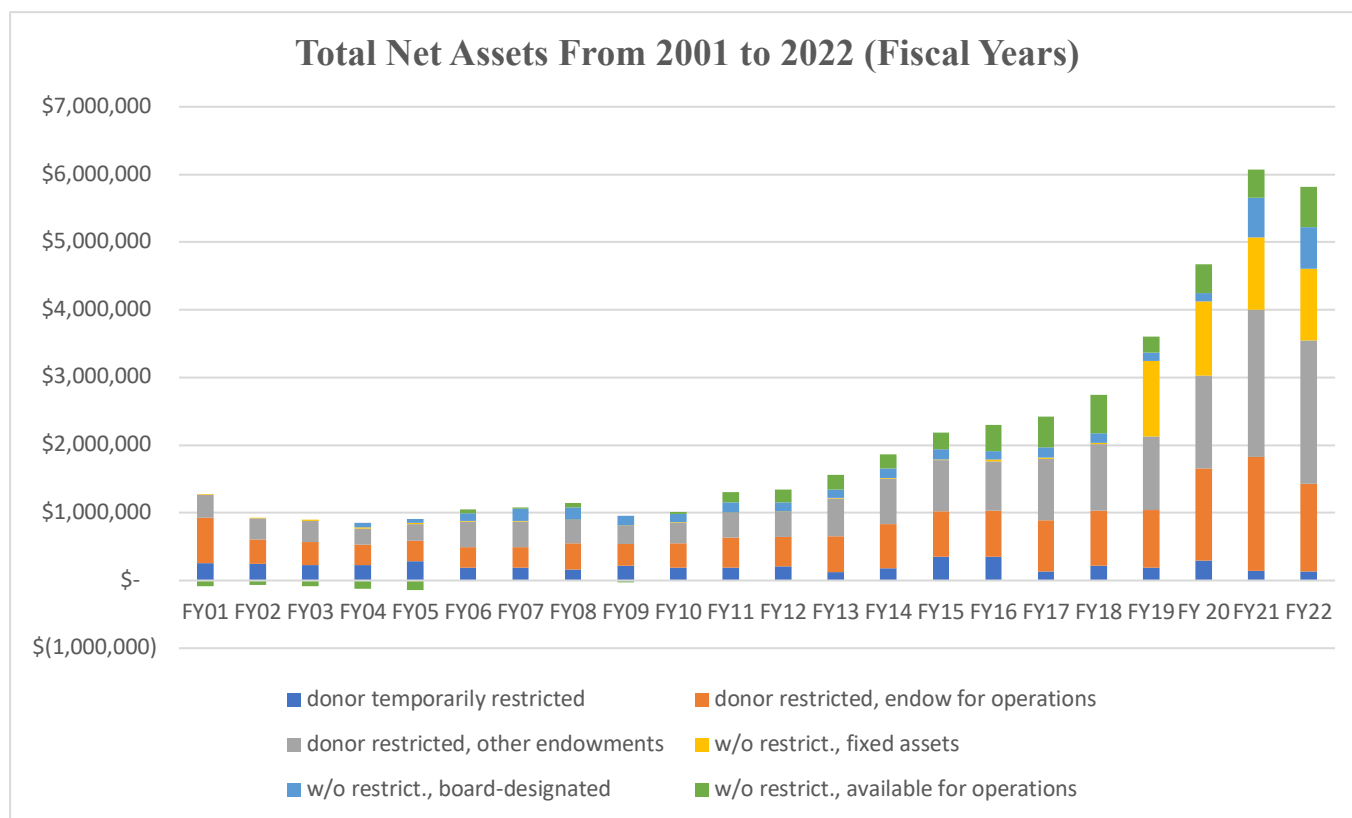
1. *Review of ASOR's finances* and a discussion of how I think you can plan for the long-term and not just focus on surviving or emerging from a pandemic. Unlike many other learned societies, ASOR is growing as we come out of the pandemic.
2. *Review of core programs* that will provide the programmatic and financial base for ASOR to play this transformative role in the second quarter of the 21st century for which I am advocating. That is, we should not lose site of the basics as we seek to have new ideas, be creative, and launch new initiatives to address changing times.
3. *Observations and recommendations concerning new initiatives* that may address some of these challenges.

1. Review of ASOR's Finances with an Eye Towards Future Planning and Fundraising:

ASOR's financial position remains strong despite poor stock performance in the first half of 2022. The chart below shows that net assets are growing, and they are poised to provide a solid foundation for ASOR well into the future.

Thanks to ASOR's donors and to your support as trustees, ASOR was able to fund almost \$250,000 in scholarships, fellowships, grants, and awards in 2022. A campaign to celebrate our organization's 125th anniversary will enable ASOR to continue to grow. Recent corrections in the stock market make this a good time create new endowments or add contributions to current endowments.

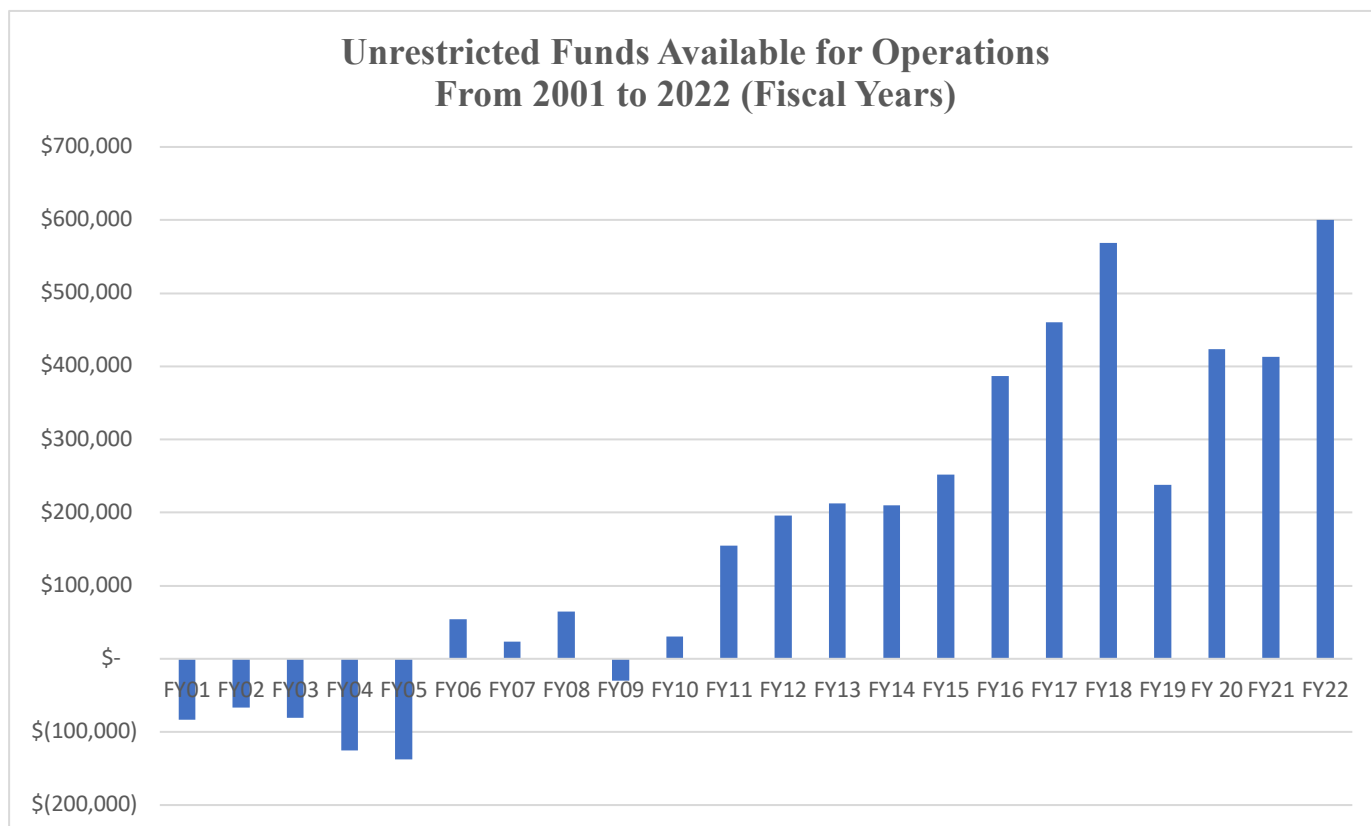
The chart on the next page shows how ASOR's assets have grown over the last twenty years. The assets dropped a bit in FY2022 due to market losses, but we are still in a solid position and poised to add to our assets with endowments that can advance our core programs and the goals set forward in the strategic plan (see Sections II and III below).



- Donor temporarily restricted: See Note F in audit. These are designated funds that must be spent for a donor-specified purpose.
- Donor restricted, endowment for operations: See Note G in audit. 5% distributions support operating budget.
- Donor restricted, other endowments: See Note G in audit. Currently 5% (Platt is 6%) distributions based on last 12 quarters.
- Without restrictions, fixed assets: See Note D in audit (primarily the James F. Strange Center).
- Without restrictions, board-designated: See Page 2 (Balance Sheet) of audit. These are unrestricted assets that have had restrictions placed on them by the Board. As such, the Board can change or remove those restrictions—Building Fund, Publications Fund, Kershaw Fund (newsletter)
- Without donor restrictions, available for operations: See Page 2 (Balance Sheet) of audit. This is the amount available for operations without restrictions.

Assets Available for Operations—what allows you (as trustees) to plan for the long-term

You will remember that ASOR's eviction from Boston University necessitated the use of several hundred thousand dollars of unrestricted funds for operations to help with the purchase of the James F. Strange Center. The COVID pandemic then placed further strains on operations. Yet, you were bold and authorized awarding scholarships to everyone with a need. ASOR received two forgivable PPP loans (\$118,700 each), and membership scholarships and the loyalty of your fellow members helped ASOR reach all-time membership highs (about 2200). Memberships were flat between 2021–2022 (after > 12% gains in 2021).



The chart above shows a surplus of about \$68,000 in FY22, plus the second forgivable PPP loan. You now have unrestricted assets for operations of > \$600,000. You can plan for the long-term.

We certainly do not want to waste this surplus, but you do not need to plan and think like we did in the 2000s when the unrestricted funds available for operations often had a negative balance.

You will hear me repeat the refrain... This strong position means that you can think about adopting programs for the long-term and about raising funds to continue transformational work.

II. Review of core programs that will provide the programmatic and financial base

ASOR core programs drive our revenue streams:

- a. Royalties from journals and past publications: about \$230,000 per year (almost all from journals). Journals are not only a core program, they are part of our financial revenue base and much of what motivates people to join ASOR.
- b. Membership dues support: about \$210,000 from individual memberships and \$60,000 from institutional memberships. People join ASOR because of our core programs, so I discuss membership growth at the end of this section on core programs.
- c. Annual Meeting registrations and associated revenue from hotel and exhibits: about \$200,000 per year. Like journals, the Annual Meeting is a core program and a major revenue stream. Unlike journals, the Annual Meeting does not break even after salaries

and benefits, but we could not afford our current level of staff without the Annual Meeting. It is also our most visible program.

- d. Grants—especially ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives: The total varies between \$200,000 to \$800,000 per year. ASOR CHI provides important financial support for staffing, and the amazing work completed demonstrates to the public and to our members how and why ASOR is changing the world for the better today.
- e. Fundraising. Membership and subscriptions are a core base for our budget, but they only provide 40-50% of our operating budget. The Annual Fund provides \$125,000 per year, and other designated gifts endow our fellowships, scholarships, and grants. There is a circular pattern—the generous support from our donors enables ASOR to do amazing work and award scholarships and grants. That work, the scholarships, the fellowships, and the grants in turn attract members and donors who conclude that ASOR is an excellent value for them to accomplish their charitable goals. Again, success of the core programs is the key to future gifts.

Journals—a major driver for royalty revenue and academic memberships.



The *Bulletin of ASOR* continues to publish leading articles in archaeology and related disciplines. The scholarly articles found in *BASOR* continue to be a major membership driver for scholars. Similarly, the *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* is considered the flagship journal in a specialized discipline, and it motivates specialists in Assyriology to be ASOR members. *Near Eastern Archaeology* continues to publish scholarly articles with copious photographs; however, *NEA* is no longer a resource that attracts public members and non-specialists. Beginning in 2023, ASOR will add *Maarav: A Journal for the Study of the Northwest Semitic Languages and Literatures* as our fourth journal published together with University of Chicago Press. In early 2023, UCP will redesign the cover to make it consistent with our other journals. We hope that UCP will also redesign the cover for *JCS* at the same time so that all four journals have a consistent look. *Maarav* will be available online for no additional charge to all ASOR members above the associate level, and this journal promises to draw biblical specialists and experts in Northwest Semitic languages and literatures back to ASOR. **We should not diminish the importance of these scholarly journals in maintaining our base memberships, but we need to realize that the market is near saturation.**



Friends of ASOR Programs: Online and internet publications, in-person seminar, travel tours—a major driver for public memberships. As alluded to above, *NEA* has experienced decreasing subscriptions separate from memberships since the name change from *The Biblical Archaeologist*. I do wish to re-engage in a debate (that decision happened 25 years ago, and it is history). Rather, I opine that *NEA* is now more of a professional magazine than a public-facing publication. At the same time, the Friends of ASOR attracts public members (members of the public who are professionals in non-academic fields). *Ancient Near East Today (ANE Today)* is published weekly as an online e-newsletter, and it has about 16,500 subscribers or Friends. The FOA Webinar series is produced bimonthly, and it plays a fundraising role for membership and Annual Meeting scholarships. The webinar program also attracts public members. **Online publications and programs have become ASOR’s primary mechanism to attract public members, and we should think about other products (in-person seminars and trips) that might draw new people to ASOR membership.**



In-person seminars and trips: The Israel 2023 trip is now full, and we are trying to shuffle rooms so that we can add a few extra people. This trip is attracting new members and new potential donors to ASOR. We should look at other trips in the future. Related, we are planning a private, donor tour to Tunisia by invitation only (if any trustees which to go, please let Andy knows). The Tunisia trip will take place immediately after Ramadan (April 21, 2023) and highlight ASOR CHI work in Tunisia. We are asking participants of both Israel and Tunisia trip to donate in addition to the travel costs. Finally, we are tentatively planning an in-person seminar in Raleigh – Durham, NC in mid-May 2023. The in-person seminars were key in attracting new members and donors to ASOR in the past (three of whom have now contributed six-figure donations since joining. Dr. Jennie Ebeling is serving as Academic Director of the Friends of ASOR Outreach programs and overseeing most of these outreach initiatives.

Friends of ASOR
 Archaeological Tour of Israel &
 Palestinian Authority Areas 2023

Arrival: Sunday, February 19
 Departure: Friday, March 3

13 days, 27 sites, 30 scholars
 Partnering with Mejdī Tours

\$7,500* | Double occupancy
 \$9,000* | Single occupancy
 *Includes a \$1,000 donation to FOA

Annual Meeting: Both the in-person and virtual components are professionally delivered. The Program Committee continues to deliver first-class academic sessions. The content is the biggest factor for the success of the Annual Meeting, and the Annual Meeting helps ASOR attract or retain at least 400 members per year. The Annual Meeting is just as important as journals for ASOR's operations.



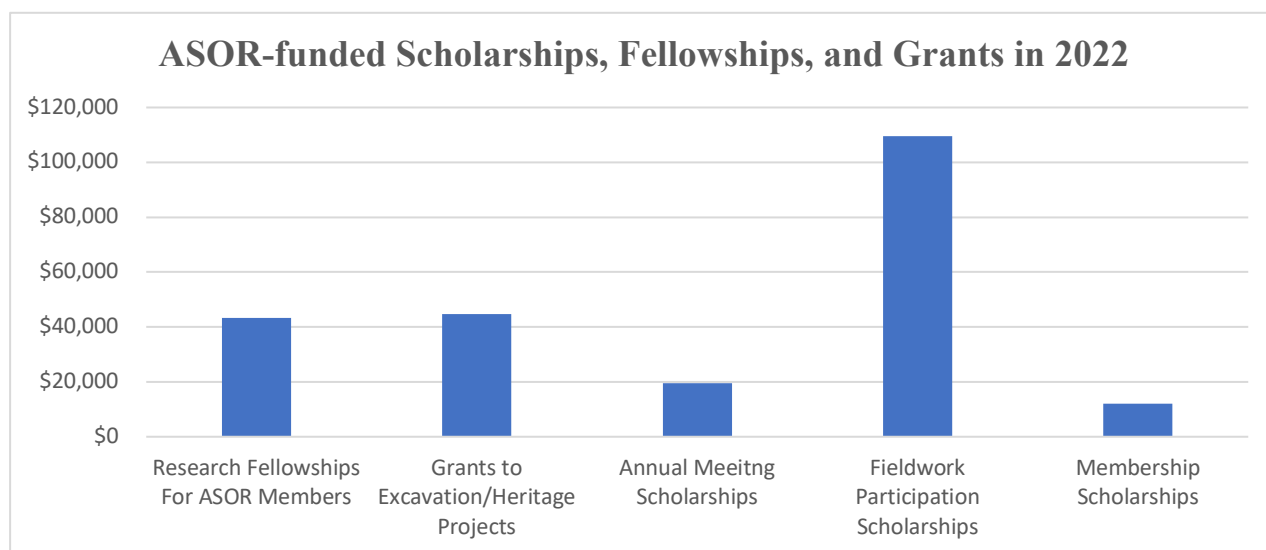
Cultural Heritage Initiatives: Not only do ASOR CHI activities advance goals contained in ASOR's strategic plan, but ASOR CHI provides important indirect and direct-dollar support for ASOR's budget (including direct-charged salaries for core ASOR staff). Of course, these staff track hours for ASOR CHI, so these direct dollars do not add to ASOR's budget revenue, but the coverage of these salaries enables ASOR to have more staff with more specialties and to provide more programs than would be otherwise possible. If ASOR does not maintain about \$500,000 to \$700,000 per year of federal grants, we would need to find other revenue sources to maintain our current level of operations for more than a 3–5 years. The following is a list of recent and current federal grants:

- SLY80019GR0005 (US DOS, Ambassadors' Fund for Cultural Preservation 2019 for outreach efforts in Libya = \$73,108 (**grant completed** [2019-2021]))
- SLY80020GR0003 (US DOS, Ambassadors' Fund for Cultural Preservation (CPAIG) 2020 for documentation project in Cyrene, Libya) = \$74,992.18 ([2020 – 2022] **grant completed**)
- SLY80019GR0016-M003 (US DOS, Embassy to Libya, for anti-trafficking efforts; coordination w/ Department of Antiquities Libya) = \$287,841 (Began Sep 2019; ends Sept 30, 2024)
- SLY80020GR0002 (US DOS, Embassy to Libya for supporting travel of Libyan professionals to meetings) = \$50,000 (Began Sep 2020; ends Dec 31, 2022)
- SLMAQM21GR3180 (US DOS, Bureau of DRL for work on religious and ethnic minority sites in Tunisia and Morocco). \$740,740 (Began Aug 2021; ends May 31, 2023, if ext. approved)
- SLY80021GR3016 (US DOS, CPAIG outreach work in Libya and the Maghreb [emphasis on Libya]) = \$200,000 (Began Sep 2021; ends Sept 30, 2023)
- SLY80022GR0010 US DOS, CPAIG 2022 grant for inventory and database work / improvements in Libya. \$100,000 (Began Aug 2022; ends Aug 31, 2024).

- STS80022GR0011-M002 (US DOS, Tunisia Public Affairs Section for professional development and Tunisian meeting support). \$33,840.49 (Began May 2022; ends December 31, 2023)
- SAQMIP22GR0056 (US DOS, Bureau of DRL for work on religious and ethnic minority sites in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso). \$740,740 (Began Oct 2022; ends Sept 30, 2024)

Scholarships, Fellowships, Grants—You awarded more than \$222,000 in 2022. Growing ASOR’s endowments has made this possible, and continued growth in those endowments will make it sustainable. ASOR awarded a larger number of scholarships in 2022 because many field participation scholarships were deferred from 2021 because of the COVID pandemic. Not only do these scholarships, grants, and fellowships advance the goals in the strategic plan and support ASOR’s members, but they draw new members and new donors to ASOR.

Increasing gifts to endowments and current-year scholarships for memberships and registrations will be critical for seeing these programs grow and become sustainable in the future. Fundraising for these endowments should be an important part of any future campaign. Legacy gifts will also be extremely important—we have seen our Legacy Circle grow, and further growth could be transformative for these endowments to support ASOR’s members.



Membership growth: our goal is increase 5% per year

ASOR’s membership was about 950 in 2007. Today we have 2200 members. We experienced an almost 15% growth in membership from 2020 to 2021, but membership was flat from 2021 to 2022. Membership growth of 10% per year or more will be difficult to sustain, so our goal is to have consistent 5% growth. This is still ambitious; we would reach 3,000 members in 2029 with 5% growth annually.

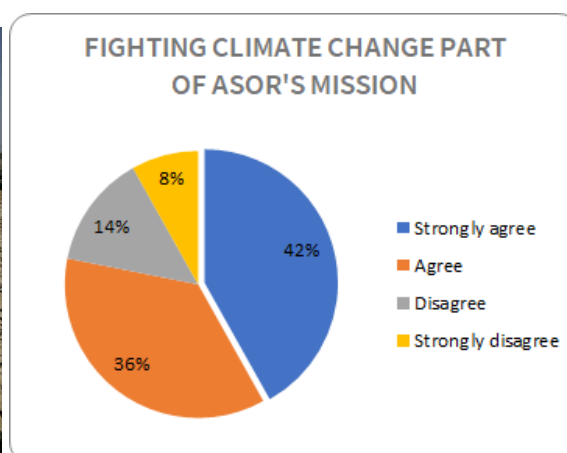
This goal is ambitious, but it is attainable. It is also what ASOR needs to continue addressing our challenges. As outlined above, we need to maintain journals and publications, but we need to grow new programs if our impact is going to continue to expand. I think that there is room for growth in the Annual Meeting and in Friends of ASOR initiatives. As mentioned in our strategic plan, these new initiatives will necessitate attracting more public members.

III. Observations / recommendations concerning new initiatives to address new challenges

III.A Climate Impact observations and recommendations

Consistent with comments above where I encourage ASOR to think about what type of organization we should be in the second quarter of the 21st century, I find that climate change is one of the most important issues facing ASOR today. During a Board meeting 18 months ago, I was asked if I thought DEI and climate change were two of the most important issues facing ASOR—I responded yes at that time, and my assessment of their importance and priority for the future of ASOR is even stronger today.

Why We Should Act in 2023



Left: An Iraqi man walks past a canoe sitting on dry, cracked earth in the Chibayish marshes near the southern Iraqi city of Nasiriyah. Right: A majority of ASOR members surveyed agreed that fighting climate change is part of ASOR's mission.

Quoting from the Climate Impact Report: “In the face of a climate emergency that threatens not only contemporary life but also the record of our shared past, how will ASOR respond? The *ad hoc* Climate Impact Committee encourages the ASOR Board to adopt concrete actions toward the goal of making the Annual Meeting carbon neutral. ASOR’s leadership in academic decarbonization would not only advance the public good but would be a motivating factor in attracting and retaining the new generation of ASOR members. Reducing the carbon footprint of the Annual Meeting is the most visible and immediate action ASOR can take to reduce its climate impact.”

I hope that all Trustees will review carefully the exhaustive report that was prepared by the *Ad Hoc* Climate Impact Committee. A debt of gratitude is owed to all committee members who met monthly (or more), and how devoted a couple hundred hours of volunteer time to investigating this issue. A special thanks is due to Virginia Herrmann, who chaired the ad hoc committee. In the following, I share my recommendations as Executive Director for the Board.

1. First, I conclude that this report confirms that climate change is today the single biggest threat to tangible cultural heritage (including built heritage and archaeological sites). I

also think that the committee convincingly showed that reducing climate impact is (and should be) part of ASOR's mission. I acknowledge that questions about the correlation to ASOR's mission are greater on ASOR Board than in ASOR's general membership (about 80% of members seem them as related).

2. It is my assessment that ASOR should be a leader in terms of climate change to grow and to remain relevant in the second quarter of the 21st century. I think this will be important for ASOR to remain a leader and to meet the 5% membership goal that I outlined above.
3. The Climate Impact report lays out several alternative paths to carbon footprint reduction at the AM. Ultimately, it will be your decision as to which of these paths to choose. Depending on your decision, it is possible for ASOR to hold a carbon neutral meeting by 2025. Achieving this goal would require carbon offsets; I should stress that the majority (but not all) of committee members felt that carbon offsets should be a last resort. Because ASOR members value see the in-person meeting as critical to our mission and work, I think that offsets will be a necessary component to achieve the carbon neutrality.
4. I recommend that ASOR committees should react and respond to this report. As the Board discussion made clear in May 2022, this report should be shared with ASOR Committees and then discussed in the CCC. I completely support that approach, but I urge us not to delay action for 18 to 36 months. We can move quickly and have concrete proposals to consider by the April 2023, Board Meeting. The *ad hoc* Climate Impact Committee included recommendations to be considered, and I do not mean for my list for the Board at this November Meeting to replace that larger list of recommendations.
5. Sustainability Fund. I urge the ASOR Development Committee to raise money for an ASOR Sustainability Fund that would award \$40,000 – \$50,000 per year as micro grants to ASOR members and ASOR-affiliated projects and ASOR partners to carry out climate projects in North Africa and the Middle East. This recommendation is one option found in the Climate Report, and I think that it is an excellent way for ASOR to make an impact without just virtue signaling. ASOR's "carbon offsets" would go beyond the minimum levels, and they would support the people and sites in the MENA regions, and these funds would support the work of ASOR members and partners. The money would go directly to those who can bring about change and raise awareness. If we can identify donors, I think that we could launch a sustainability fund in 2023 regardless of other larger decisions.
6. Annual Meeting locations. I think that the Climate Report should cause us to rethink future meeting locations. Meetings in Denver, San Antonio, and San Diego would have a much greater carbon impact than meetings in the Mid-Atlantic, Boston, or Chicago. In addition, we have not been able to find rates in San Diego under \$200 per night, and the smaller levels of concessions and support offered in San Diego would add \$30,000 to \$40,000 to the cost of the meeting (on top of the high hotel rates for attendees).

III. B Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion observations and recommendations

Our efforts to make all our programs more accessible for underserved groups continue; however, I must admit that we have not achieved the progress that we had hoped to achieve. I think that this shortcoming is primarily an issue of staffing capacity.

Fortunately, we now have in place a DEI committee that can guide the staff and recommend budget allocations to address areas of need. The DEI Committee is forming its inaugural classes and formulating attainable goals and objectives, and I am hopeful that you will make budget allocations for the summer of 2024 that can help us meet these challenges.

First, what went well with DEI—there was (and is) a lot of progress, and we should celebrate these successes.

Perhaps most significantly, your approval of a campaign to establish a BIPOC endowment resulted in a fund that supported five (5) fieldwork participation scholarships in 2022—and will continue in perpetuity. This is amazing. After a little more than two years following the murder of George Floyd, some sibling societies are not continuing to devote the same level of funding to fight racism and to promote inclusion as they did in 2020 and 2021. The fact that you established an endowment for BIPOC scholarships means that ASOR will continue this level of support.



While it is not enough to correct decades of disparities, the five (5) BIPOC scholarship recipients from 2022 will make a difference. I hope that you will continue to support this endowment fund so that the number of BIPOC scholarship can grow to 7 and then 8, and eventually 10 per year.

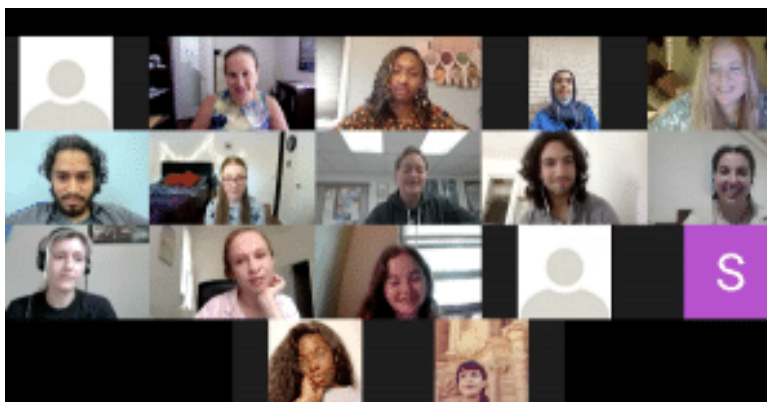
The increased level of membership and participation in ASOR by people from North Africa and the Middle East (especially scholars from Arabic speaking countries) is another area of success that should be celebrated. Thanks to almost \$20,000 in scholarship donations from ASOR members, you have been able to award membership scholarships and Annual Meeting registration grants to all from the MENA region who had a need.

These ASOR donations were supplemented by medium-sized grants from two US embassies that supported participation by citizens from Libya and Tunisia in our Annual Meeting (7 Tunisians and 8 Libyans will be attending the Annual Meeting this year in Boston). In addition, ASOR received funding to support 20 hours of simultaneous Arabic translation in the Virtual Annual Meeting component. Each of these sessions had between 20 and 30 participants, and conversations took place between colleagues from Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Tunisia, and Morocco. Because of the interest and success in these conversations, ASOR CHI will hold several follow up virtual in January. Moreover, just last week we had initial virtual meeting with French interpretation for the ASOR team and interested people in Burkina Faso.

These programs in North Africa that you have supported are now resulting in increased interest in ASOR. They are also starting to bear fruit in terms of providing financial support from ASOR members in North America and Europe to conduct research in the MENA region. One example is the just recently announced Dar Ben Gacem Fellowship for research in Tunisia. A local Tunisian businesswoman has established a fellowship to pay for room and half board for one month in Tunisia for a North American or European ASOR member. Just two weeks ago, another Tunisian businesswoman added funding for intensive Arabic or French study to be undertaken concurrently with residency in Tunis for this research. These two Tunisian citizens see ASOR a worthwhile partner, and they want to help fund programs to increase involvement in the Maghreb by ASOR members.

The meeting with colleagues from Burkina Faso represents an expansion of a program to safeguard and protect heritage of ethnic and religious minorities in North Africa. We have discovered that there are connections between the Sahel (and the sub-Saharan trade networks) and the wider Mediterranean, and these projects will bring more people of color into ASOR.

What remains—why did I say that we have not achieved what we hoped to achieve? I do not want to diminish successes, but we have yet to realize the desired integration into ASOR for minority groups has yet to be realized. For example, last year we started a cohort program for BIPOC students and for other people of color to ensure that they had a positive experience in ASOR. We have not continued that program, primarily because of lack of funding and lack of staff capacity. Similarly, we desired to match minority members and scholarship recipients with mentors. After some initial conversations, that program stalled because of lack of staff capacity and funding.



Mentoring Group from 2021

Finally, we had planned to develop videos for cultural competency training and sexual harassment awareness for all recipients of field participation scholarships and for the directors of those digs. ASOR awarded 57 field participation scholarships in 2022, so we could have had a major impact on recipients and dig directors. Fortunately, many of these scholarships are endowed, so there is a chance to do this training in 2023—but we need to raise the funds to develop the resources and funds to support the staff time.

In conclusion, I want to return to the point that I made at the beginning of this section. We now have a DEI Committee who can guide ASOR with mentoring and sustainability efforts. Funding for these programs and staff capacity is one key. The current budget only provides support for these initiatives if designated dollars are raised. I urge you to support these programs in the next fiscal year.

Concluding remarks

Thank you for all that you do for ASOR. Your dedication to our shared mission is inspiring. You give of your time, talents, and resources. Although I have outlined challenges and decisions that need to be made because that is what is required in a report like this, you should take a moment to celebrate as well. ASOR is truly advancing the public good and changing the world for the better. You gave away more than \$225,000 in 2022, and you have positioned ASOR to continue this work in the future.

I look forward to our conversations as you decide how ASOR will grow and make an impact in the 2nd Quarter of the 21st century.