

ASOR Vision Statement

First, I want to state that I think that ASOR is in a very healthy place overall, in terms of what we are doing – an active annual meeting, excellent publications, support for fieldwork of different kinds, and development – although it is interesting that because of ASOR’s health and size we have shifted out of crisis mode and into long-range planning mode. And this long-term health of the organization leads me to my first point.

1. ASOR needs to continue to seek a broad audience for its programs, publications, and outreach. To me, this includes scholars of ancient history, archaeology, Biblical studies, cultural heritage, digital humanities and philology, as well as serious laypersons who are interested in these same topics. We are all aware that on the formal academic side, the humanities are in flux, with budget cuts impacting tenure positions, library holdings, and student support. Fewer students are choosing to undertake (expensive) degrees that do not appear to lead directly to jobs. On the other hand, the growth of the availability of the internet has meant a growth in audiences interested in and eager for information about the ancient world.

In thinking about the future, we can ensure the long-term viability of ASOR by bringing younger members in to positions of responsibility. While I appreciate that younger members may have pressing needs on their time, I think ASOR should continue to work to make sure that the younger members understand they have a voice in the future of ASOR (e.g. making certain there are slots on committees beyond the Early Scholars Committee, bringing them on to the Board, giving committees a strong voice in the organization), and that we readily acknowledge their contributions of time, thought, and work to the organization.

On the other side of thinking about audiences and the future, I think we need to discuss the role and benefits of institutional affiliation. Not only do institutional members bring important viewpoints to the discussion, but they need to show their institutions the tangible benefits of joining ASOR.

2. The second overall point is again related to moving out of crisis mode. While we do need to deepen and extend ASOR’s audience we also need to sharpen the focus on our “brand” (I don’t particularly like that word, as it smacks of advertisement, but it gets at what I was thinking about). We do not need to, nor should we, replicate other learned societies such as the AIA, SBL or MESA, but we need to provide programming and member-opportunities to learn about and work in regions or areas of specialty that are specific and of interest to the membership. I would include thinking about the goals and outreach of CAP, Cultural Heritage Committee, COP, development and Friends of ASOR. Having the committees and the Board think about and discuss ASOR’s remand would be the first step in defining what we mean when we say “ASOR”. I would expect these discussions to have ramifications on everything from our programming for the Friends of ASOR seminars to our support for student excavators to the information we put on our website to which cultural heritage projects we endeavor to support.

Part of rethinking who we are would be repairing relationships with members (or former members) in Lebanon and Jordan, including repairing our relationship with ACOR. While we value our Israeli colleagues, we need to make sure that we do not appear to have a thumb on the scales in the favor of any one organization or national entity. We can begin doing this by focusing our efforts on the ancient world, not contemporary politics. The Cultural Heritage Committee suggested years ago that the Board consider a policy on the publication of statements about contemporary events, and I would like the Board to consider such a policy. While I understand that all archaeology (the area I know best) is in a sense political, and that there are thorny issues inherent in the publication of archaeological materials (COP, I know, is struggling to find a solution to materials from 'contested territories'), I think ASOR should consider a policy that the organization remain true to its motto and stay away from speaking as one voice about current political statements. This is a nuanced and difficult topic that would certainly provoke strong emotions, but one that I think needs to be discussed on a wider scale than has happened up to now.

Finally, ASOR has done really amazing work at in-country cultural heritage projects. To me, these projects are essential to the mission of ASOR and need to be supported. While I do not expect to be involved in grants at the level or size that ASOR was supervising during the Syrian war, I fully supported the hiring of a grants project manager to work on smaller grants which we have the resources to manage and move forward. I also encourage the continued inspection of current staff levels and their job descriptions – we have excellent staff who need to know that they are supported and can grow in their jobs – while ensuring that they can maintain a decent working environment.

I should close with a quick evaluation of my working style. I am a consensus builder; I love working with smart people like the ones I meet at ASOR functions; I am a careful listener; I pay attention to detail; and I am a good administrator. I love meeting people. My weakest area is development, which I have never done to any serious degree. In terms of my personal timeline, I will be retiring from Temple University in May 2026 and would thus be interested in a new challenge, as I will be newly freed from university committees and grading.