

Report to the CCC regarding the workshop “What’s in a Name?” Re-assessing the Oriental in the American Schools of Oriental Research” at the November 2018 Annual Meeting

By Danielle Steen Fatkin, Department of History, Knox College

Background:

At last year’s annual meeting, members organized a workshop related to ASOR’s name. Papers were pre-circulated to enhance discussion during the workshop (they are still available at this URL: <http://bit.ly/ASOR2018Orientalism>). The five papers by Kathleen Bennallack, Danielle Steen Fatkin, Michael Homan, Ian W.N. Jones, and Melissa Bailey Kuttner presented critiques of Orientalism and suggested that the organization reconsider having “Oriental” as part of its name. President Susan Ackermann acted as respondent at the panel and presented information related to the history of ASOR’s name and recent rebranding. The audience at this session was large, filling one of the larger meeting rooms – audience size is estimated at 100 people.

Following the thirty-minute introduction to the workshop, there was a question-and-answer period. Most audience members expressed support for re-visiting the organization’s name, though a few did question whether a new name was necessary. One noted critique was that “Near Eastern” was in no way satisfactory as a substitute for “Oriental.”

The remainder of the workshop was dedicated to an audience discussion of the issues raised by the papers and Q&A. The workshop organizers placed audience members into groups of 5 to 6 and asked each group to fill out a worksheet with discussion questions (see Appendix 1 “Worksheet Template” and Appendix 2 “Completed Worksheets”). The worksheets collected some demographic information and posed three discussion questions. These small groups met for approximately 30 minutes.

The final part of the panel consisted of reporting out from the small groups. While the audience had shrunk somewhat by this point, consisting of perhaps 50 people, there was overwhelming consensus among those who remained that ASOR should change its name.

Data:

Table: Demographic Information of workshop participants (see Appendix 2 for source)

Types of members		Types of institutions	
Graduate student	6	R-1 University	17
Post-doc; no current position	1	Smaller research university	8
Adjunct / VAP (non-TT)	4	Seminary	1
Tenure-track	3	Small liberal arts college	6
Tenured	8	Historically Black college or university	1

Senior	6	Government	
Museum research / curation	3	Museum	3
Researcher (gov't, other)	2	Research center	5
Other	9	Other	3

Written comments (selected from small group worksheets; see Appendix 2 for full comments)

- This would be a baby step in the process of de-colonizing archaeology; shows that ASOR is aware of and participating in these efforts
- If there is general agreement that the name is considered problematic by the public, then this is a sufficient reason to change
- Europeans think of ASOR as a global organization – also consider changing the “American” part of the name
- We like the “American” and “Research” part of the name; “schools” and “Oriental” are problematic
- Just because it’s hard doesn’t mean we shouldn’t do it
- The Oriental part is racist
- The most compelling reason to change the name is because it’s the right thing to do
- Change the name to “American Schools Of Research”? (same acronym)
- The issue of changing the organization’s name and relating the organization to publications is surmountable; names change all the time and libraries have ways of dealing with this issue
- It is not enough to decide to change the name; there needs to be a viable alternative
- Also re-visit the “schools” part of the name since the schools have become independent overseas research centers?
- What about having the word “international” in the name?
- Do we need to specify a geographic region? Could you rename the organization with no reference to geography? (stated in various ways by most of the small groups)
- Could do an educational campaign to help with name recognition for the new name
- Bottom-line: not every tradition is good. The KKK has a long tradition and great name recognition. If we (ASOR) want to be inclusive (and welcome younger, non-white scholars), “oriental” needs to go.
- Establish a diversity, equity, and inclusion committee; a committee like this can assist the board with very practical suggestions to make the meeting more inclusive and to establish programming and support for minority members.
- The disadvantages of the name include 1) it alienates students when humanities are already declining; 2) it alienates students from the MENA region; 3) it’s confusing
- Change the name because “oriental” is offensive. Period. It shuts down the conversation.
- We don’t need to explain everything in the name.

Suggestions:

- Change the name. Break the process into two votes. The first vote to the board should be: "Should ASOR change its name?" Our data suggest that there would be overwhelming support from the membership for a change. The second vote would then be about the new name. This is obviously a tricky issue, and was the stumbling block that prevented the organization from changing its name in 1982. However, this is a surmountable problem and one that must be undertaken in light of the compelling data of ASOR's own membership about their concerns over ASOR's name.
- Create a new officer and / or committee to address issues of diversity and equity. We are an overwhelmingly white discipline and an overwhelmingly white organization that works in non-white countries and studies non-white people. ASOR does not reflect the diversity of the United States or Canada or of the organizations where most of us work. ASOR should proactively address concerns of access and equity by making diversity and inclusion an institutional priority.

Closing Reflections

It was an eye opening experience as an organizer of this panel to see the honesty that our members and conference attendees brought to their reflections. Changing ASOR's name may not be easy, but I have confidence in the smart and creative people of ASOR that together we can find a new name that will insure ASOR's position as the leading learned society for the study of historical material culture from the eastern Mediterranean and south-west Asia.

APPENDIX 1: WORKSHEET TEMPLATE

Demographic information:

Types of members

Grad student:

Post-doc, no current academic position:

Adjunct / VAP (non-TT):

Tenure-track:

Tenured:

Senior:

Other:

Types of Institutions:

R-1 University:

Smaller research university:

Seminary:

Small liberal arts college:

Historically Black College or University:

Other:

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the advantages of keeping ASOR's name the same? What are the disadvantages?

2. In your mind, what is the most compelling reason to change the name?

3. If ASOR were to change its name, what should the name be? Should journal names also be changed?

APPENDIX 2: COMPLETED WORKSHEETS

Demographic information:

Types of members

Grad student: 1

Post-doc, no current academic position:

Adjunct / VAP (non-TT): 2

Tenure-track:

Tenured:

Senior:

Other: 2

Types of Institutions:

R-1 University: 2

Smaller research university: 1

Seminary:

Small liberal arts college: 1

Historically Black College or University:

Other: 1

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the advantages of keeping ASOR's name the same? What are the disadvantages?

Europeans think of ASOR as global, so just Association? But a secondary issue.

Acronym is well-known & should be kept for recognition. Shuffling might open up new names.

Schools is also misleading, re: above.

~~the~~ Name needs to change; other issues ~~might~~ be secondary.

Pragmatism is a weak defense.

Journal name will be digitally cross-referenced if changed.
See also NEA

2. In your mind, what is the most compelling reason to change the name?

Definitely time to change the name.

Chicago Oriental Theater changed its name, even.

3. If ASOR were to change its name, what should the name be? Should journal names also be changed?

Talk to people in the region about the ~~name~~.

If no geography, is the organization still regional?

Probably better to keep the name exansive.

Mediterranean Research is Raz's voice

Just have the logo or a world map w/ the area of interest colored in?

Near East works for acronym; as does Mediterranean as ME

Acronym shouldn't mean something bad in another language & also connotations in comparison to other acronyms & names.

Cultural fringe?

Lunch straw poll in the future might be good.

Demographic information:

Types of members

Grad student:

Post-doc, no current academic position:

Adjunct / VAP (non-TT): 1

Tenure-track: 2 1

Tenured: 1

Senior:

Other: 1 (curator, government,
staff, supporter of research)

Types of Institutions:

R-1 University: 1

Smaller research university: 11

Seminary:

Small liberal arts college: 1

Historically Black College or University:

Other: research center 11

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the advantages of keeping ASOR's name the same? What are the disadvantages?

Advantages

Inertia

Catharsis before change? (evaluate
colonialism/institute/work first)

Disadvantages

- risk to the journal/
losing the past

→ but this keeps focus internal
would we say the same
about the n-word?

- same letters perhaps?

2. In your mind, what is the most compelling reason to change the name?

- participates in process of de-colonizing archaeology (baby step)
- but name change needs to go w/soul-searching

3. If ASOR were to change its name, what should the name be? Should journal names also be changed?

- why should name need a geographic reference?
(reluctance to come up w/names - distraction?)
- however, ~~the~~ desire to keep acronym the same

4. The word American?

- funding issue? (funding American)
- but more & more people come from elsewhere,
so think about what it means

Demographic information:

Types of members

Grad student:

Post-doc, no current academic position: X

Adjunct / VAP (non-TT):

Tenure-track: XX

Tenured:

Senior: Y

Other: X

Types of Institutions:

R-1 University: XX

Smaller research university:

Seminary:

Small liberal arts college: XX

Historically Black College or University:

Other: X (Research Institute)

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the advantages of keeping ASOR's name the same? What are the disadvantages?

divided conclusion on this question:

- strong rejection of "Oriental" but
 - no satisfying alternative
- rebranding with equally problematic term might make the situation worse

advantages: ~~can~~ can be historically explained (at least)
no "better" solution (so far)

disadvantages: clear rejection of "Oriental"

note: the term "Oriental" does not have the same problematic connotations in Europe → depends on local history (e.g. "Semitic" definitely has)

2. In your mind, what is the most compelling reason to change the name?

- general agreement that if considered problematic by the public this is a sufficient reason to change
- heterizing students from minorities is a serious problem

3. If ASOR were to change its name, what should the name be? Should journal names also be changed?

- no agreement, but consensus that the geographical scope ~~set~~ should be reflected

NE; ME; Eastern Med → all considered problematic

- change journal name: yes
 - catalogue issues are technical and solvable
 - change from Biblical Arch → NEA journals was smooth

Demographic information:

Types of members

Grad student: \

Post-doc, no current academic position:

Adjunct / VAP (non-TT):

Tenure-track:

Tenured: ||

Senior: |||

Other: |||

Types of Institutions:

R-1 University: \

Smaller research university: ||

Seminary: \

Small liberal arts college: ||

Historically Black College or University:

Other: ||

Discussion Questions: *no ~~per~~ place for permanent lecturers*
what about comprehensive Univs
like CSUs.

1. What are the advantages of keeping ASOR's name the same? What are the disadvantages?

- just because it's hard doesn't mean we shouldn't do it
- The Oriental part is racist.
- We couldn't think of any disadvantages

Schools brand us into the space - don't need to change them. "American Schools" is a helpful term. Seemed some enthusiasm for keeping the American Schools.

Expansive

"American Schools of Original Research"

American Schools - but won't understand.

2. In your mind, what is the most compelling reason to change the name?

Because it's the right thing to do

People in regions think of CARL + ACOR
not ASOR.

med over-arching sense of not divided
by geography - ~~thought~~ thinking

Ancient Near East + Eastern Med.

Ancient West Asian +

Real concern about losing students.

Need to be more inclusive.

3. If ASOR were to change its name, what should the name be? Should journal names also be changed?

We already changed the name of the ^{Biblical and} journal

Talking America away is problematic. We
are in America need to keep it we are
an American org with internat membership.

American Schools of Research (The world
formerly known as Rome)

Name is not who we are - it's just a
beginning

American Schools of Ancient Near Eastern
Studies.

We should ask students what they
think.

Demographic information:

Types of members

Grad student: |

Post-doc, no current academic position:

Adjunct / VAP (non-TT):

Tenure-track:

Tenured: |||

Senior:

Other: program director
curator
museum director/curator

Discussion Questions:

Types of Institutions:

Harvard
Dartmouth
Penn State
R-1 University: Columbia, U of Michigan

Smaller research university: East Carolina University

Seminary:

Small liberal arts college:

Historically Black College or University:

Other: Museum
ORC ①

1. What are the advantages of keeping ASOR's name the same? What are the disadvantages?

Publications - Librarian issue, there are ways to link organizations/publications change names all the time

ACORZ - switching to 'of' (proposed this year)
away from Oriental

Academic departments switched ages ago

America vs International -

European institutions take umbrage at ~~the~~ American institutions taking international scope

International scholars may have some cache ~~and~~ American affiliation

Middle East is problematic - but not as much as Oriental

NAACP hasn't changed name... problem of othering

Geography does hold ASOR members together - but that has evolved over the years

name versus mission statement

Advocacy role in cultural heritage beyond scholarly community
not enough to decide to change name - need a viable alternative

BASOR is not a "bulletin"...

~~2. In your mind, what is the most compelling reason to change the name?~~

How to change name? Board needs to decide; ^{member} vote would require bylaw change
"Schools" is also a problem - very oblique and not central to mission (we funded affiliated schools)
ASOR used to run schools + sponsor excavations - now a more learned ~~soc~~ society
we are in favor of "Americas" and "Research"; "schools" and "oriental" are problematic - but for different reasons
general consensus in Naming is "archaeological" is too limiting focus

could we have a colon to specify geographic area?
American Society of Research:

3. If ASOR were to change its name, what should the name be? Should journal names also be changed?

Demographic information:

Types of members

Grad student: X X

Post-doc, no current academic position:

Adjunct / VAP (non-TT):

Tenure-track:

Tenured:

Senior: X-overlaid

Other: Research faculty
(not tenure track - like clinical faculty)
Federal archaeology
Discussion Questions:

Types of Institutions:

R-1 University: Univ. of Michigan,
Univ. of Nevada, Johns Hopkins University (x2)
Smaller research university:

Seminary:

Small liberal arts college:

Historically Black College or University:

Other:

Large State Univ.

Museums

Latino? too?
could be good!

1. What are the advantages of keeping ASOR's name the same? What are the disadvantages?

What about using the word "international" in the name? Maybe need to ditch the geographical reference altogether.

Could be a positive change - people might like it.

Could do an educational campaign to help with name recognition for the new name.

Could have a ~~help~~ "help us rename ourselves" - could be write-in campaign.

Bottom-line - not every tradition is good. The KKK has a long tradition and great ^{name} recognition. If we (ASOR) want to be inclusive, "oriental" needs to go.

↳ and ~~full~~ ^{be} open + welcoming to younger, non-white scholars

"American" in the name seemed okay to this group. suggestion

American Schools/Society of Asian, African, + Anatolian Research
could add Mediterranean

2. In your mind, what is the most compelling reason to change the name?

to not be racist, to be more inclusive,
+ welcoming

U.S. has a huge population of Asian descent

3. If ASOR were to change its name, what should the name be? Should journal names also be changed?

Yes, they will develop new name recognition.

If all membership can't vote and it's a trustee decision,
can we have a membership wide survey (that includes
institutional members)

ESTABLISH A DIVERSITY, EQUITY, + INCLUSIONS
COMMITTEE → a committee like this
can assist the board

with very practical suggestions
to make the meeting more inclusive,
+ to establish ~~program~~ programming +
support for minority members.

Demographic information:

Types of members

Grad student: 1

Post-doc, no current academic position:

Adjunct / VAP (non-TT): 1

Tenure-track:

Tenured: 2

Senior: 1

Other: (1 museum staff; 1 administration)

Types of Institutions:

R-1 University: 2

Smaller research university: 1

Seminary:

Small liberal arts college: 1

Historically Black College or University: 1

Other: Museum 1; Research center 1

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the advantages of keeping ASOR's name the same? What are the disadvantages?

Advantage: they felt this wasn't worth talking about as number one thing was get rid of "oriental"

Disadvantage: Alienate students when humanities already declining. Alienates scholars from MENA region. Confusing. Step One: we have to drop oriental. Then worry about rest.

2. In your mind, what is the most compelling reason to change the name?

Change name b/c oriental is offensive. period. It shuts down the conversation.

3. If ASOR were to change its name, what should the name be? Should journal names also be changed?

We don't need to explain everything in the name. There was a debate about importance of geographical ID. Keep American. Some suggested American Schools of Old World Research. All said journals and everything, drop oriental, and do it very soon. They said journals not a problem. We used to be Biblical Archaeology before we were NEA.