

**“Dirt, Digging, Dreams, and Drama:  
Why Presenting Proper Archaeology to the Public is Crucial for the Future of our Field”  
ASOR 2019 Plenary Address  
Eric H. Cline**

**Introduction**

Thank you, Susan, and thank you to the Program Committee and to the Committee Chairs for the invitation to speak tonight. And, thank you all for being here.

I was talking back in March to a guy whom we had just hired to feed our cats while we were away from home. This guy, whose name is Ivan, asked what I do for a living. When I told him that I’m an archaeologist, his first question was about giants, specifically those mentioned in the Bible. It seems that Ivan had just watched a show about biblical giants on TV the night before and he was wondering if it was accurate. He then asked me about all sorts of other things, including about the claims made in other shows that he had recently seen on TV as well.

I’m also asked the same sorts of things by the handyman who stops by every so often to clean the gutters on our house. We affectionally call him “Smelly Mike,” but he doesn’t know that, so please don’t tell him – let’s keep that just between us here tonight, ok? And, some years ago, a distant cousin of mine, Reuben, cornered me at a bar mitzvah and asked me if I knew where the Ark of the Covenant is now.

I’m sure that I’m not alone in having such encounters; undoubtedly, they happen to many of you as well, but I offer these as three examples of members of the general public. Ivan, Reuben, and Smelly Mike should be our target audience, but when they go to the bookstore or online to Amazon, for the most part they don’t see books written by us that are meant for them, so instead they’re buying the books that are written by non-archaeologists, most of whom have learned how to write for the general public. This must change. It’s as simple as that.

Therefore, I’d like to take this opportunity, and this platform, to sound a call to arms and to ask all of *you* to begin writing more things aimed at the general public. They don’t have to be books – they can be tweets, blog posts, articles for *ANE Today* or *Medium* or even the *Huffington Post* – but I think it is absolutely imperative that we all do so, especially if our academic field is going to survive in this day and age. I’d also like to talk a bit about how we might go about doing that.

**It Was Once Commonplace...**

Writing for the general public was once fairly commonplace. Previous generations of Near Eastern archaeologists knew full well the need to bring their work before the eyes of the world.

Think of the books that V. Gordon Childe wrote for the public, including *Man Makes Himself* and *New Light on the Most Ancient East*. He also wrote *What Happened in History*, which reportedly he opted to have published by Penguin Books instead of Oxford University Press, so that it would be cheaper and thus could more easily reach “the masses,” as he called the general public.

Think also of Sir Leonard Woolley’s books, including *Dead Towns and Living Men; Digging Up the Past; and A Forgotten Kingdom*. Think of Gertrude Bell and her book *The Desert and the Sown*, as well as others that she wrote.

Think back to James Henry Breasted and his book *Ancient Times – A History of the Early World*. Abigail Rockefeller read that book and told her husband, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., about it.

That led directly to him giving a lot of money – millions of dollars in today’s terms -- to Breasted, in order to found the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago, which is celebrating its centennial this year. He also funded most of the seasons of excavation at Megiddo from 1925 to 1939.

Breasted even made a movie, called “The Human Adventure,” which featured the exploits of the Oriental Institute, including their excavations in four different countries. It debuted at Carnegie Hall and then played around the country in the 1930s. It can now be seen on the Oriental Institute’s YouTube channel.

Think also of William F. Albright and his book, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, and of Yigael Yadin and his coffee table book on Masada, as well as his book on Hazor; and think of Dame Kathleen Kenyon’s books, *Digging up Jericho* and *Digging up Jerusalem*, as well as *Archaeology in the Holy Land*.

There were a whole host of other famous archaeologists who lectured widely and wrote prolifically. There were also others, such as the British archaeologist Glyn Daniel, who hosted the BBC TV show “*Animal, Vegetable, Mineral?*” in the 1950s. That show featured Sir Mortimer Wheeler, who was voted TV personality of the year in 1954; Glyn Daniel won the same award the very next year. There was also an American TV show called “*What in the World?*” that was developed by Froelich Rainey, Director of the Penn Museum, and which featured archaeological objects; that show ran for 15 years in the 1950s and 1960s.

Now, some of these scholars were more successful than others at reaching the public, and some of their books are more accessible than others, for I must admit that some are quite densely written. However, many of them began their books by saying why they were writing them.

For example, in 1914, Breasted wrote the following in the introduction to his book *Ancient Times* (the book that so influenced the Rockefellers): “*In the selection of subject matter as well as in style and diction, it has been the purpose of the author to make this book sufficiently simple to be put into the hands of first-year high-school pupils. A great deal of labor has been devoted to the mere task of clear and simple statement and arrangement. ... While simple enough for first-year high-school work, it nevertheless is planned to interest and stimulate all students of high-school age*” (p. iii).

Having read this book, I must admit to being a bit stunned that he was aiming it at first year high school students, but it is certainly written at a level that can be easily read and understood by current college students, even though of course it is vastly out of date by this point.

The other scholars said similar things in their introductions, but I think that you get the point. It is interesting now to read through these books which were so deliberately aimed at the general public, written by some of the biggest names in the field. The public was hungry for accurate information back then, nearly a century ago, and I would argue that it is still hungry for it today. I daresay that that the members of the general public who are here tonight would wholeheartedly agree.

### **Time to Begin Again**

And yet, with a few exceptions, we have lost sight of this, sacrificed to the goal of achieving tenure and other perceived institutional norms. We have left it to others to tell our stories for us, not always to our satisfaction, and the public does not always know who or what to believe. I say that it is time for us to take control again. I believe that it is time – long past time, in fact -- for us all -- not just a few, but as many as possible -- to once again begin telling our own stories about our findings and presenting our archaeological work in ways that make it relevant, interesting, and

engaging to a broader audience. And, in fact, it's *fun* to do so – who doesn't want to talk to an audience that really wants to know what we're finding and what we think about the ancient world?

Moreover, I would point out that ASOR's own Professional Conduct Policy repeatedly calls for us to do exactly this. ASOR's mission statement says that we are supposed to encourage and support public understanding of the cultures and history of the Near East from the earliest times. It lists six things that we are supposed to be doing, and number six is to offer "*educational opportunities in Near Eastern history and archaeology...through outreach to the general public.*"

Now, obviously, this can take a number of different forms, including lectures, but the policy then goes on to specify in particular "*dissemination of knowledge through publication,*" which includes "*the use of venues and languages accessible to the general public.*" This is part of the very fabric of who we are -- our own policy specifies that we should be writing things aimed at the general public, in addition to our more-traditional output of scholarly articles and books -- but for the most part, we have gotten away from this.

There are some ASOR members who are already doing this, including some of you who are here tonight. Look at Jodi Magness and her new book on Masada which just came out this past May. Look at Sarah Parcak with her book on satellite imagery that was published this past July. Speaking of Sarah Parcak, she is the only one of us who has appeared on The Late Show with Steven Colbert and Kara Cooney is the only one to have appeared on The Late, Late Show with Craig Ferguson. We need more, more, more. We are a long way from the days of Glyn Daniel, Mortimer Wheeler, and Froelich Rainey.

### **Public Intellectuals**

In fact, what I think we're also lacking these days, and have been for quite a while, are more of what I would call "public facing scholars" in our field. Other fields have had them, such as Margaret Meade, Jane Goodall, Dian Fossey, Mary Leakey, Jacques Cousteau, Carl Sagan, Stephen Hawking, Neil DeGrasse Tyson, and others.

Nowadays, such people are often referred to as "public intellectuals." Personally, I prefer the term "public facing scholars" as being more accurate; it also, quite frankly, doesn't sound as elitist. They comment upon their area of expertise and strive to present their work and make it accessible to the general public. Some of them do get into trouble by commenting on things outside their specialty, but when they stay within their area of expertise, their opinions and interpretations are very important and are essential in terms of conveying information to the general public in an accessible way.

In fact, in an article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* back in October 2017 (<https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Making-of-a-Public/241332>), Devoney Looser wrote "*...more academics need to embrace the public-intellectual role. It's good for our careers and it's good for our institutions and disciplines, [as well as for] the public.*"

Whatever you want to call them, we need more of them in archaeology, ancient history, religious studies, and other related disciplines. At the moment, I see mainly Candida Moss fulfilling that role as a frequent commentator on religious topics for various TV channels; Bob Cargill and Mark Goodacre also appear on various TV shows, especially about the New Testament. They are all doing a great job, but we need more people to join them – especially more ASOR people.

I would also single out Aren Maier for his tremendous effort in teaching an entire class on biblical archaeology on the internet recently, which reached literally thousands of people. I sincerely hope that he is thinking about turning it into a popular book. ☺

### **Additional ASOR Members are already doing this...**

Now, returning to the topic of other ASOR members who have written for the general public, Amnon Ben-Tor has done a general book on Hazor. David Ussishkin has written general books about Lachish and now Megiddo. Oded Borowski did one called *Daily Life in Biblical Times* and another one called *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel*. Lisa Cooper has written about Gertrude Bell. Rachel Hallote did one on Frederick Bliss.

Bill Dever has been extremely prolific in this regard, with a number of books in recent years. Neil Silberman, whom I talked to when I first thought about trying to write popularizing books, and several times since then, has written important and accessible books on Yigael Yadin, the history of biblical archaeology, and numerous other topics, and he and Israel Finkelstein wrote the best-selling book *The Bible Unearthed* as well as a book on David and Solomon, both of which are aimed at general audiences.

### **The Humanities Under Attack**

There are others of you out there as well, and I apologize for not having time to highlight each of you by name. However, more of us – many more of us -- need to bring our work to life for the public far more than we are currently doing. As I have said, it is time for us to once again begin to tell our own stories about our findings and our takes on the ancient world. Our livelihoods, and the future of the field, depend upon it, for this is true not only for our lectures and writings for the general public but also in our classrooms.

You are all aware that the humanities are currently under attack and are threatened by funding cuts at many of our institutions, including at my own university. If we are unable to successfully engage our own students, and to show both them and the university administrators that good research goes hand in hand with good teaching, lecturing, and writing, we will not only risk the future of our departments but will also fail to cultivate the next generation of archaeologists. And I think we would all agree that we don't want that to happen.

In fact, that's exactly why the NEH began something called the "Public Scholar Program" a few years ago, to encourage us to write such books. These are grants that they began awarding in 2015, specifically to support "*the creation of well-researched books in the humanities intended to reach a broad readership,*" as they say on their website. I got one the very first year that they were offered, for my Megiddo book that will be published in March. Since then Jodi Magness got one for the Masada book that she just published and now Elise Friedland has received one to work on a book on Greek and Roman influences on the architecture of Washington DC.

Clearly, the NEH is aware of the need for those of us working in the humanities and the social sciences to reach the public. I would urge many of you to apply for this grant – the application information for the next awards just went live on the NEH website (<https://www.neh.gov/grants/research/public-scholar-program>) and the application itself is not due until February 5<sup>th</sup>, so you've got two and a half months to pull it together. As my friend and colleague Chris Rollston said to me, the only thing that can turn around the threats to the humanities is if we "make the case" for our field and demonstrate our relevance to society. But, no pressure; no pressure!

### **Telling Stories for a Living**

Let me hasten to reassure those of you who are sitting in the audience and who may be thinking dubiously about this idea of writing for the general public. You can do it. Why and how

do I know this? Because what we all really do for a living is to tell stories. Stop and think about that for just a minute, but it's pretty obvious.

We *all* tell stories, whether we realize it or not. Yes, we do it especially in the classroom, but also at dinner parties and family gatherings as well, where people frequently perceive us as having a much more glamorous job than we actually do. Whether you are a pottery person, a faunal expert, a radiocarbon person, a skeletal or DNA expert, an underwater archaeologist or a land based one, a bio-archaeologist, a text person, an epigrapher, an art historian, or whatever, we are all trying to figure out what happened back then. We are each digging at sites or investigating questions or working on problems that the public would be interested in learning about. In fact, we are all *constantly* telling stories about what we do, or what we found, or what we think happened back in some particular time period or at some particular place or to some specific group of people. You all already know that -- it's quite literally what we do for a living.

And people want to hear what we have to say – there's no denying that. Actually, we need to *embrace* that fact -- there are still people out there, lots and lots of people, who are interested. They were there when Albright, Breasted, Woolley, Childe, Bell, Yadin, and Kenyon were writing and they are still there now. That's why *Biblical Archaeology Review* has been around for more than forty years under Hershel Shanks and now Bob Cargill. That's why there are so many television documentaries constantly being made, most of them on the same topics over and over and over again – Troy and the Trojan War; Jericho; the Ark of the Covenant; New Testament stories; and so on. People are interested – really, really, *really* interested -- about the stuff that we do, even if it doesn't include ancient aliens. There is, quite simply, a hunger out there for stories about the ancient world – the *real* ancient world.

### **How I Do It**

Speaking of which, when I was invited to speak tonight, I was specifically asked to talk about how I have been able to present my work in a way that makes it relevant, interesting, and able to be engaged by a broader audience. In short, how is it that I am able to take data that non-archaeologists might perceive to be dry or arcane and make it interesting to the general public?

That's actually a very easy question to answer, because every time that I'm putting together a lecture or writing something meant for the general public, I do it as if my wife's grandmother Honey is going to be in the audience or is going to read it. Her name was Ethel Schwartz, but we all called her "Honey." Bless her heart, and may she rest in peace, she passed away a few years ago, but she was my biggest fan...and a passionate devotee of biblical archaeology. She had a subscription to *Biblical Archaeology Review* for decades and even had a Letter to the Editor published once. In fact, when the ASOR meetings were in San Antonio back in the early 2000s, she asked me to introduce her to Hershel Shanks and that was the absolute biggest thrill for her.

She was a very smart lady -- she went to Northwestern University in the 1920s, enrolling as a freshman when she was fifteen years old, and then lived the rest of her life back in El Paso. She took classes on all sorts of topics at the local community college until she was well into her eighties. However, she would watch those shows on TV – you all know the ones that I mean -- and she would call me excitedly every time, saying things like, "*Eric, they found the Ark of the Covenant!*" And I would reply, "*Again?*" So, she was my target audience: an interested, educated, smart layperson who really wanted to learn, and wanted to get answers to her questions, even if she eventually found out that there is no conclusive answer yet.

I actually use the same mantra for writing books as I do when crafting my class lectures and my lectures to the general public. For lectures, for instance, my rule of thumb is always: "*if*

*it's boring to me, it'll definitely be boring to them, so figure out how to make it not boring.*" In fact, I've found, every time, that if something is interesting to me, I can make it interesting to them. So, don't make it boring; make it interesting. Tell it as a story or pose it as a question to which they need to figure out the answer or that they need to discuss. Get them involved somehow, whether they are your students in a classroom, an audience listening to your lecture, or someone reading your book.

So, that's the short answer as to how I do it – write or lecture as if you are doing so for a member of your family, *and make it interesting.*

### **Where Do Ideas Come From?**

Now, I can hear some of you, or most of you, still being hesitant. Go ahead; admit it. You're saying, "*Even if I wanted to, I don't know what I would write a book about. I don't have any ideas for topics that people want to hear.*" Am I right? And again, I would say that you couldn't be more wrong. Of course you have ideas; you have lots of ideas. So, where do such ideas come from? Well, from anywhere and everywhere – the dining room table, the bar, the family reunion, the classroom.

For instance, my book *From Eden to Exile* came out of a gig in which I was a consultant for a National Geographic TV series and is based on questions that I am asked most frequently, like my cousin Reuben asking me where the Ark of the Covenant is now. My *Three Stones Make a Wall* book is based on the lectures that I give in my Introduction to Archaeology class. And the material in my *1177 BC* book comes straight out of the lectures that I've been giving for years in my Ancient Near East and Egypt course and in my Aegean Bronze Age course.

I think popular books on sites like Ashkelon, Heshbon, Gezer, Jezreel, Safi, Rehov, and other ancient places would be of great interest to the general public. Books on Starkey, Crowfoot, and other early archaeologists would also be of great interest, like the one that Rachel Hallote wrote about Frederick Bliss and Lisa Cooper wrote on Gertrude Bell. What about popularizing books on nomads, on agriculture and farming, on maritime archaeology, or on dozens of other topics that we could come up with in a matter of minutes in a brain-storming session?

So, think about what you are asked most often, or about what you think is a really interesting find or discovery that you've made, and write something on that. **Make** them interested in that obscure aspect of your site, which they hadn't heard about previously. I suspect, in fact, that nearly all of you have an idea or two for what you could write about, so I would encourage you to think for a moment and ask yourself what topic you would choose if you were allowed to write about anything that you wanted to.

But, we also need to keep in mind that the general populace out there is pretty smart, and pretty savvy as well. They appreciate a story that is told by a professional, just as long as it is told well and without too much jargon. However, it is sometimes hard for them to tell who is a professional and who is not. We all grouse and grumble about pseudoarchaeologists, and sure, they are a problem, especially those who masquerade as professionals. But they are more of a problem because they are doing what we are not -- they know how to write for the public and are reaching them.

That's why I would argue that the best way to counter them is not by going after them and trying to argue with them or debunk them -- I've tried that and it doesn't work. No, the single best way to counter the pseudoarchaeologists, in my opinion, is to put out our own books that tell about our finds and our hypotheses and our sites and simply outnumber them – swamp them with our stories, drown them with our data, humble them with our hypotheses, bury them with our books.

That's the way to do it. And, you'll notice, that I'm deliberately not showing a slide with any of those books pictured.

### **It's Not Easy...But You Can Do It**

I won't kid you, though; it's not as easy as it might look. A few years ago, Patricia McAnany and Norman Yoffee put it bluntly. In the introduction to their edited volume entitled *Questioning Collapse*, they wrote, "*our stories are not easy to construct and even harder to narrate to a public that is interested in what we do. ... Scholars' prose can become tortured – full of scholarly references to other researchers' efforts and couched in conditional phrases such as "could have" or "possibly" in order to express the uncertainty in understanding peoples and cultures remote in time or space*" (2010: 1-2). This is very true, as we all know. Trying to tell a story while remaining true to our scientific values can be very difficult, as can the negotiations with your publisher about how many footnotes you can include and how lengthy your bibliography can be. It is also simply easier to hide behind technological terms, academic jargon, and impenetrable phrases...and justifying it by saying that you're being "scholarly." It is far, far more difficult to explain things clearly, in simple and concise language, so that anyone and everyone can understand it, including your wife's grandmother.

But, while it's not easy, we can do it; *you* can do it. In fact, I can see a lot of people here in this room right now that could do it. I *know* you can do it. And we *need* to do it. It is in all of our best interests to do so, not least to ensure the future of the field, as I've said, and to keep remembering that there are a lot of people out there who are interested in what we have to say. I don't need to remind all of you of the joy that we feel about this field; this is why we do it – if we didn't like it, we'd get out. We try to pass that joy on to our students when we are teaching, but we also need to do it for the public in our writing and in our general lectures. The public wants to know what we are thinking about the ancient world, but we are not giving it to them, with a few notable exceptions. But that can easily be changed.

### **A Challenge to Publishers...and to Ourselves**

In fact, I think that our academic book publishers need to rise up to the challenge and create some new series specifically for trade books written by professionals and aimed at the general public. So my call to arms tonight is to them as well. Thames and Hudson used to have the "Ancient Peoples and Places" series back in the day and Princeton now has the "Turning Points in Ancient History" series. We need more like that -- Routledge, and Cambridge, and Oxford, and other university and private presses, need to do the same.

In actuality, whether they will publicly admit it or not, many of the publishers out there are hungry for trade books that will sell to the general public. What publisher would not want to put out a book that will sell ten or twenty thousand copies rather than to just 700 libraries and a few dozen scholars at most? Those scholarly books are tremendously important, don't get me wrong. But the general public is hungry for books written for them as well...and there are a lot more of them than there are of us.

And most of the acquiring editors are very happy to have you pitch ideas to them; after all, that's a huge part of their job, and that's in part why they have booths at conferences like this – they're not here just to sell you books, but as many of you know, they are also here to chat with all of you about your ideas for future books. That's how our volume *The Social Archaeology of the Levant*, which Assaf Yasur-Landau, Yorke Rowan, and I edited, came into being, actually – it

was born in the bar at the ASOR meetings a couple of years ago, when we were having drinks with an acquisition editor from Cambridge University Press.

The acquisition editors may also visit your campus and pick your brains for potential topics that either you or someone else could write about. Both represent opportunities for you to trot out those ideas that you've been harboring in the back of your mind...or that you should have been harboring...

And in turn, we professionals needed to step up and agree to write these books, for in doing so, we will not only inspire the current generation but also the next generation. I do realize, of course, that a lot of you are already overcommitted to all sorts of other things and that it may be impossible right now to find the time, but this is something that can be done when you do have the time, even if it means waiting until you retire. But I would urge you to do it, whether now, in a year or two, or a decade from now.

For instance, you never know what impact your book will have on a youngster who is just beginning to explore the topics that interest them. That's what happened to me – when I was seven years old, my mother gave me a book about Heinrich Schliemann and his excavations at Troy. After reading it, I declared then and there that I was going to be an archaeologist. I still have that book, because my mother gave it to me again when I graduated from college with my degree in archaeology. And now it's in my office at GW.

So, was it a book that influenced you as a youngster or as a young adult to become an archaeologist? Forget about watching *Indiana Jones* -- how many of you read a book, or books, about archaeology at an early age and decided that's what you wanted to do? Let's see a show of hands. If so, do you remember which book it was? And have you gone back recently and looked at it again, to see what was so special about it? It's tough to write for young adults, but perhaps some of you would be more comfortable doing that and getting them while they're younger...and that's perfectly fine! I've now done it myself, twice, but not on my own -- I had a lot of help.

Back in 2001 or 2002, Oxford University Press paired me with Jill Rubalcaba, a wonderful author who writes for young adults. They asked us to write a book about ancient Egypt. It was part of a series called *The World in Ancient Times*, spearheaded by Ronald Mellor and Amanda Podany, which were meant to be textbooks for sixth graders. Jill and I got along so well that we subsequently co-authored another book for young adults specifically on the Trojan War, which I personally found very satisfying because it meant I had come full circle from the book that I read when I was seven years old.

### **A Moral Responsibility**

Now, again, don't get me wrong -- I'm not arguing that we should neglect our academic scholarship in favor of just publishing popularizing books. Not at all; not by a long shot. However, I would quote from a Distinguished Lecture that Jeremy Sabloff gave to the American Anthropological Association (AAA) about a decade ago, in 2010 (<https://vimeo.com/17850878>). First, he told them that "*We have a moral responsibility to educate the public about what we do.*" And then he said, "*We need to share with the public our excitement in our work. ... We also need to share our insights into how the people of the past lived and how our understandings of the past can inform us about the present and the future.*" He stressed in particular that "*We need to share all this in ways that everyone, from young schoolchildren to committed amateur archaeologists to government policy makers, can understand and appreciate.*" I can personally attest to the latter; it is sometimes startling to realize that some of things we write can come to the attention of policy



makers, but that's exactly what happened to me, with both my *Jerusalem Besieged* and my *1177 BC* books.

But, I can also hear those of you who are tenure track, or who are aiming to be, saying that writing for the general public doesn't usually count as much in tenure or promotion decisions as do articles in journals with a high impact factor. You also may be worried that you can't publish popularizing articles or books until you have tenure because the powers that be won't think that you're serious enough. And I do mean that I hear you; these are very real fears and you are correct to be concerned. How many of you fall into one of those categories?

In fact, there was an article published by Manya Whitaker in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* at the end of September which was entitled "Which Publications Matter at Which Stages of Your Career?" (<https://www.chronicle.com/article/Which-Publications-Matter-at/247192>). The part that caused the most chatter on Twitter, Facebook, and other social media was when the author said "*Too many early career scholars seem to be investing their time and energy writing a lot for the wrong kinds of publications. By "wrong," [the author says,] I mean venues that won't lead to tenure.*" And by that, the author means specifically blogs and other such postings on social media and other public facing arenas.

While I and others had a gut reaction to that article, and while I completely disagree with its "old school" arguments, I can also see why the author wrote it. The Egyptologist Aidan Dodson said in a post on Facebook back in April, "*The powers-that-be drone on about 'impact', but in practice do little to encourage the production of attractive synthetic works...There's also an inverse-snobbery still to be found in some corners about 'selling out' and becoming 'populist'.*"

I would add that I've seen some reviews of popularizing books where the reviewer was clearly either not familiar with, or not entirely comfortable with, the genre of writing for the public. They just didn't "get it." The same may well hold for promotion and tenure committees, so this is where senior scholars need to step up to the plate. In fact, that was my main "take away" from the *Chronicle* article – not that it is wrong to be writing blog posts and other public facing articles, but rather that such should be done *in addition* to publishing in traditional venues – I certainly don't want anyone to be denied tenure because of what I'm saying here tonight!

Along the same lines, it is also absolutely imperative that senior scholars on Promotion and Tenure committees advocate for their younger colleagues who are publishing in non-traditional venues along with traditional venues. It might help to point out that by doing so, they are frequently reaching much larger audiences with a popularizing version of the article that they have previously published in a peer-reviewed journal read by just a select few – I am thinking here especially of articles aimed at the general public which appear in *ANE Today* or *Biblical Archaeology Review* after the peer-reviewed version has appeared in *AJA*, *BASOR*, *Tel Aviv*, *IJA*, or elsewhere.

In fact, in his Distinguished Lecture to the AAA a decade ago, Sabloff argued that such popularizing publications should count just as much as academic publications. He said, and I quote, "*Service to the public can certainly be argued to be an essential part of the contribution to the discipline. ... Effective writing for general audience(s) requires excellent control of the appropriate...literature and the ability to comprehend and articulate clearly the core issues of one's area, time period, or problem. Therefore, it should be subject to the same kind of qualitative academic assessment that ideally goes on today in any academic tenure, promotion, or hiring procedure.*"

I will say that, in the intervening years, since Sabloff said all of that back in 2010, things are finally beginning to change, albeit slowly. In part, it's because administrators are realizing that writing for the public can be crucial both for funding and for public support for universities. But I

have to admit, even so, and just to be safe, that my own rule of thumb over the years has been to try to publish two scholarly articles, including co-authored pieces, for every popular book or article that I put out. It hasn't come out to exactly that ratio, but it seems to have worked out fairly well, so you might try doing something similar.

### **Tips on Writing**

Now, I can also hear you saying, “*I can't do that – even if I had a good idea, I can't write an entire popularizing book.*” How many of you have said that to yourself? Well, to you, and to everyone else, I would reply, “*of course you can.*” All of us have had to slog through writing a dissertation and for many that is enough. When you're done, you swear “*no more.*” But, we all write, almost every day, whether it is lecture notes for class or whatever. And those mount up...and they might someday be turned into a book, perhaps much to your surprise. That's exactly what happened with my *Three Stones Make a Wall* book, as I said.

I will be the first to admit that writing entire books can certainly be difficult, and that members of the public might actually want to read shorter pieces, especially those that they don't have to pay for. So, as I said at the beginning of tonight's talk, you might want to start out by trying your hand at blogging, or tweeting, or writing a short article for *Near Eastern Archaeology*, or *ANE Today*, or *Biblical Archaeology Review*, if that's what you are more comfortable doing. (That also goes for those of you who *are* quite comfortable writing, but who are pressed for time because of other commitments.)

There are a number of people doing such things, and others who started out that way who have since gone on to write for journals like *Forbes* and *Hyperallergic* – I am thinking here of people including those who are not necessarily members of ASOR but who are working in related fields, like David Anderson with pseudo-archaeology; Sarah Bond and classical archaeology; Kristina Killgrove on bio-archaeology; and Candida Moss on religion topics – they are doing it and so should we. So, do whatever it is that you are most comfortable doing, or have time to do, at least to start with.

In fact, Mitchell Allen suggests that if you are a relative newcomer to writing for the public, it might be better to discover your public voice by doing such shorter pieces, since it's less risky and, frankly, less of an investment than immediately leaping into a 100,000-word project. And, occasionally, a shorter piece like that will get picked up by the media, which will spread your ideas far and wide, sometimes quite unexpectedly. Many of you know Mitch – he founded both Altamira Press and Left Coast Press, after getting his Ph.D. from UCLA with a dissertation on the Neo-Assyrians – and some of you in this audience have actually published books with one or both of those two presses. I consider him to be a writing guru with sage advice and I have personally consulted with him on numerous occasions.

So, what are a few secrets to successful writing? I'm not a writing guru like Mitch by any stretch of the imagination, nor would I ever pretend to be one, but I can tell you what works for me, if that helps.

My first suggestion is probably counter-intuitive, because I'd say that the most important thing is NOT to deliberately set aside specific times to write, because that just puts pressure on you during those times, when you might not feel like writing. Instead, write whenever and wherever the Muse hits. That's what I do. If you're in a position to drop everything and start jotting down notes, thoughts, or even full sentences, do so while you can. Run, do not walk, to your nearest computer, or grab your iPad, and begin typing.

Even if you're not in a position to drop everything, just grab your phone, or the nearest napkin or the back of an envelope, and begin jotting things down or even dictating. Use the Voice Memo function on your phone, for instance, to get your thoughts down while they are flowing and fresh; even if they're in very rough form, you can always edit them later.

And, perhaps just as importantly, if nothing is coming to you, don't force it. Go run errands, pay bills, prepare for your next class, or write a recommendation letter. I guarantee that, along the way, something will occur to you out of the blue, while you're not forcing yourself to write, and especially if you're procrastinating about doing the other things.

When you *are* writing, though, try doing it in a space without distractions – turn off your cell phone; turn off the wifi connection on your laptop or desktop; and close the door. Either have complete quiet or turn on some music, but if you do put on music, make sure that it is quiet, in the background, so that you're not tempted to sing along. Sometimes I have Santana or some jazz on; sometime it's Mozart or Beethoven – it just depends upon my mood. The important thing for me is to create a soothing atmosphere in which I can let my thoughts flow and my fingers dance over the keyboard without interruption. When I'm in “the flow,” as it's called, and my thoughts are tumbling out so quickly that I almost can't type fast enough to keep up, I will frequently forget to eat or even to stand up for hours at a time, which can be both bad and good. When I emerge back into the real world, I often feel as if I've been sculpting or painting, except that I was doing so with words rather than with marble, charcoal, or watercolors. It is a fabulous, creative feeling – one that makes me enjoy the journey rather than just trying to get to the destination.

Also, I always leave something unfinished when I quit for the day, and I leave a brief note for myself regarding what I was going to do next. That way I can jump right back in when I begin again...because getting started each time is the hardest part for me. If I can pick up right where I left off, then I'm almost immediately back in the flow.

If you have absolutely no idea where to begin, or are having trouble leaving behind the world of stilted academic writing and jargon, or even if you know exactly what to do and how you want to do it, go pick up a copy of the second edition of Brian Fagan's excellent book, *Writing Archaeology: Telling Stories About the Past*, and follow the instructions that he gives there. It is an invaluable resource and probably the best thing that I have ever read on the topic of how to present archaeology to the public in an interesting and understandable way.

There's also New York Times Science writer Cornelia Dean's book, *Am I Making Myself Perfectly Clear? A Scientist's Guide to Talking to the Public*. In addition, Mitch wrote an article almost twenty years ago, in 2002, called “Reaching the Hidden Audience: Ten Rules for the Archaeological Writer.” It was published in a volume called *Public Benefits of Archaeology*, edited by Barbara Little, and is now posted on his Academia.edu page, if you want to go get it. In that article, he says, “*Find a hook! Tell a story. Include yourself. Write in plain English (or Spanish or Hopi). Talk to a single reader. ... Use only the data you need. ... [And] always think of your audience.*”

### **Concluding Words**

Honestly, it is my dream to see a bunch of publicly-accessible tweets, blogs, articles, and books begin to appear, and to see all of you on the best-seller lists within the next few years.

But, let me end with a challenge to each and every one of you here tonight. As soon as you can, perhaps even during these meetings or right after they are over, jot down something about your work which you find interesting and about which you are passionate – something that you think the general public should care about. It could be a small point, an interesting fact, an

observation, an informed opinion, or what I would call “cocktail party trivia,” perhaps even lifted from your presentation, if you are giving one here. Then put it out there in the public sphere and see what happens. It could be a short tweet with an ASOR hashtag or perhaps a post on Facebook or Instagram tonight or tomorrow or the next day. It could be a slightly longer blog post when you get back home, or a brief article for *ANE Today* or the *Huffington Post* that you submit in a few weeks. Every bit counts and you never know where it might take you. And, let me know that you’ve done it; I’ll try to keep track of what everyone has done and report back on how we’re doing.

Now, there may be some of you, maybe even many of you, who don’t feel like doing any of this. I certainly respect that and I thank you for listening to me politely this evening. However, if the *rest* of you who are here tonight take me up on this challenge and write something that Ivan, and Reuben, and Smelly Mike, and Honey would want to read, I believe that our field, our students, and the general public will all be the better for it. *We need* to do it – *ASOR* needs us to do it.