



# asor

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting  
Aug 3, 2020 4:00 PM-5:30 PM EDT ZOOM

Present: Richard Coffman (Chair of the Board); Sharon Herbert (President); Chuck Jones (Vice President); Heather McKee (Treasurer); Ann-Marie Knoblauch (Secretary); Jane DeRose Evans; Eric Meyers; Joe Seger; Andy Vaughn (Executive Director), Susan Ackerman (Past President)

Absent: Lynn Swartz Dodd

### 1. Call to Order

- The meeting was called to order at 4:17 PM (Richard Coffman)

### 2. Approval of agenda

- **BE IT RESOLVED:** The agenda is approved by unanimous consent.

### 3. Next steps about ASOR's name (Sharon Herbert)

- Sharon noted that the Ad Hoc Committee on ASOR's Name had planned to bring a report to the Board in April 2021, but events of the past few months have called for us to speed up the process.
- We are hearing from a number of people on this issue; it is time for ASOR to drop the word "Oriental."
- Discussion turned to a new name for ASOR, and whether or not to keep the ASOR acronym with new words (such as American Society for Overseas Research) or find an entirely new name and acronym.
- A recent poll administered by the Ad Hoc Name Committee included five new names (and acronyms). While keeping the ASOR acronym was not an option on that poll, keeping the ASOR acronym was noted in many of the polls' write-in comments.
- Ann-Marie suggested we break the discussion into two parts: a decision on removing the word "Oriental," and a new name.

- Eric Meyers moved, Jane DeRose Evans seconded.
- **BE IT RESOLVED:** The Executive Committee recommends to the Board that the American Schools of Oriental Research remove the

- word “Oriental” from its name.
- Unanimously approved.

- Sharon then asked about keeping the ASOR acronym.
- Susan noted that when other organizations have changed their names (for example the American Philological Association to the Society for Classical Studies), the new name was an obvious choice. The work of the Ad Hoc Name Committee and the results of member discussion and member polls make clear that there is no such obvious choice for a new name for ASOR.
- Ann-Marie suggested the ASOR acronym could be generic (such as the American Society for Overseas Research) and the tagline could be changed to reflect the geographical and chronological range.
  - Joe Seger moved, Eric Meyers seconded.
  - **BE IT RESOLVED:** The Executive Committee recommends to the Board of Trustees that the organization keep the acronym ASOR.
  - Unanimously approved.

#### 4. Open letter to the Board (Sharon Herbert)

- (See attached letter, Attachment A.)
- The Executive Committee discussed the contents of the letter and the suggestions for addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within ASOR, signed by 31 ASOR current and past members.
- Sharon suggested that a DEI Task Force would be a more effective way to address many of the points in the letter, rather than the formation of a standing committee.
- Jane noted her strong interest in expanding DEI in ASOR, suggesting that the efforts should be a part of the work of all committees, and not just a single committee.
- Chuck noted that this has been the focus of CCC discussions, to make DEI systematized rather than isolated to the work of a single committee.
- Susan agreed with a task force over a standing committee, as a task force can be more nimble and intentional, with a short term charge that can effectively advise standing committees (and other bodies within ASOR).
- Chuck suggested if such a path is pursued, the signatories of the letter be invited to nominate members of the task force.
- Susan suggested an open notice in News@ASOR for people who would like to participate.
- Ann-Marie suggested communicating that a task force is a way for them to operate more effectively, and the task force does not preclude the formation of a standing committee, and may lead to the formation of a standing committee.
- The group discussed the difference between a task force and an ad hoc committee. Andy noted that “ad hoc committee” appears in the by-laws, but “task force” does not. He stated that an “ad hoc committee” could be called a task-force, however. Susan noted that a task force has a specific task and a specific timeline.
- Sharon requested the EC’s support in the formation of a task force.
- Susan noted that the task force should not be obligated to accept as its mandate the list of demands in the open letter.
- Sharon noted the letter is addressed to the Board, and so the letter will be

discussed by the Board.

- Eric Meyers moved, Jane DeRose Evans seconded:
- **BE IT RESOLVED:** The Executive Committee affirms and endorses the president's intention to form a task force for diversity, equity and inclusion within ASOR.
- Unanimously approved.

The meeting adjourned 5:23 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ann-Marie Knoblauch

## Attachment A

### An Open Letter to the Board of ASOR:

The moniker *The American Schools of Oriental Research* is a shameful name for the most prominent membership organization in Near Eastern Studies. *Oriental* is a term rife with a legacy of negative associations. It carries with it a racist, reductionist portrayal of the multitude of communities present throughout the regions of Asia and North Africa. This critique was expressed over forty years ago in the seminal book, *Orientalism*, by Edward Said, and in his and other scholars' re-writing on the topic since.

This term connects our present work in the region, with a history of archaeology as a tool for colonialist endeavors in the construction of arbitrarily demarcated states, the theft of cultural heritage under the guise of a patronizing concern for preservation, and the continuing depiction of local communities as static and underdeveloped and therefore in need of intervention. We implore the organization to make a commitment to framing research as done at the behest of primarily local stakeholder communities, therefore carrying a duty to involve representatives in every aspect of the research process, from designing research questions to deriving best practices in fieldwork to dissemination of research findings to exhibition of cultural heritage. We envision our organization promoting this new standard in the research of our members by updating grant expectations to include documentation of these efforts as well as explicitly defining timelines for post-field analyses and the ultimate repatriation of objects of cultural value.

We are far from the first group of scholars to see an issue with this name and take action to rectify the problem. As of now, a committee has formed to move forward on devising a new name for the organization, and they have made efforts to survey the membership about potential name replacements. We support these efforts, but would caution against any utilization of 'Near Eastern' or 'Middle Eastern' in the new title, as these terms also position the region in relation to an Euro-centric perspective. This necessary divestment with this racist terminology is only the first phase of a reckoning of our participation in a system of inequality. We must undertake this effort to critique our institution if we wish to be an organization with a membership that reflects the totality of a community with interest in the study of this heritage, not just those of us in Euro-American academic institutions.

We would also like to encourage you, as a leading organization in our field, to commit to thinking about broader initiatives that contribute to promoting anti-racism and diversity and to decolonizing our profession. While promoting diversity in a more general sense is admirable, we feel that specifically supporting current and future Black and Indigenous students and scholars in the field is imperative.

- To promote a diverse member body, the organization should provide additional support and mentoring of Black students, other students of color, and other underrepresented groups. The organization should partner with faculty and students from HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) and MSIs (Minority Serving Institutions), providing them support and a strong platform to ensure that more BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) students enter the field and thrive within it.
- We ask that the organization establish a fellowship for BIPOC students.

- We ask that a policy is put in place for instituting tailored implicit bias training for those in leadership roles engaging in the process of creating and renewing any and all ASOR-affiliated field projects
- We ask that those field projects with affiliations to the organization or pursuing such affiliations be required to pursue formal collaborations with faculty at HBCUs or MSIs in order to provide more opportunities for BIPOC students to be introduced to our field and have their interest cultivated through institutional mentorship.
- We ask that the organization create a DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) Committee to address the lack of diversity in the leadership and membership of the organization. This committee should include BIPOC scholars and range from graduate students to career professionals. The committee should be headed by co-chairs in order to diversify the voices of representation on the CCC (Council of Committee Chairs). Additionally, a new Board member seat should be instituted, and this seat should be filled by a member of the DEI committee.
- We would also like to see the formation of a number of recurring workshops that would focus on ongoing efforts to decolonize our research, since the history of our profession is very much bound to white supremacist ideologies and other problematic colonial practices and systemic racism. Topics relevant to such workshops include (but are not limited to):
  - analyzing troubling histories of scholarship and identifying ways forward
  - designing syllabi that center the work of Black and minority scholars, including integration of the theoretical scholarship of scholars outside of archaeology specifically
  - developing anti-racist practices in scholarship
  - a general re-imagining of what the role of this discipline should be in the present day

These workshops should be developed in coordination with BIPOC scholars or educators, whose work should be appropriately compensated.

We the members of this organization have the power to prioritize new objectives and begin taking steps on the long arduous path to justice and equity in our discipline. This community of scholars can be visionaries in the future of ethical pursuit of our work, rather than merely doing just enough to keep up with peer institution standards.

Sincerely,

Abigail Buffington, William & Mary  
 Ioana A. Dumitru, CSRM Foundation  
 Lesley A. Gregoricka, University of South Alabama  
 Smiti Nathan, Johns Hopkins University  
 Tiffany Earley-Spadoni, University of Central Florida  
 Allison Mickel, Lehigh University  
 Laurel A. Poolman, Johns Hopkins University  
 Jill S. Waller, Johns Hopkins University  
 Morgan E. Moroney, Johns Hopkins University  
 Rosanne Liebermann, Washington University in St. Louis  
 Susan Guise Sheridan, University of Notre Dame  
 Alexander Nagel, State University of New York, FIT  
 Annalee Sekulic, Ohio State University

Rachel Kalisher, Brown University  
Pinar Durgun, The Met  
Avery Taylor, Johns Hopkins University  
Ian W. N. Jones, University of California San Diego  
Craig A. Harvey, University of Michigan  
Alexis T. Boutin, Sonoma State University  
Kara Larson, University of Michigan  
Petra M. Creamer, University of Pennsylvania  
Bianca Hand, Johns Hopkins University  
Jonathan Gardner, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School  
Anna Glenn, LMU Munich  
Danielle Steen Fatkin, Dept of History, Knox College  
Anne Austin, Assistant Professor of Anthropology & Archaeology at the University of Missouri St. Louis  
Joseph Lehner, USyd  
Marc Flores, Johns Hopkins University  
Jaime Ullinger, Quinnipiac University  
Amir Zaribaf  
Sasha Boghosian, McGill University