

**SOCIETY OF AFRICANIST ARCHAEOLOGISTS (SAfA)**  
**General Business Meeting Minutes**  
**Held Online During 25<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference, Oxford**  
**15 August 2021**

**Opening Remarks**

The SAfA General Business Meeting (GBM) was called to order at 15:47 UTC by SAfA President and Chair of the meeting, Elisabeth Hildebrand.

The Chair offered words of welcome to the membership and extended thanks to Peter Mitchell and the Oxford Organising Committee (OC), those attending the General Business Meeting (GBM), and the SAfA Executive Board (EB). The Chair thanked our Webmasters Matt Curtis and Susan McIntosh for their outstanding work in facilitating the online presentation of the 25<sup>th</sup> Oxford SAfA Biennial Conference including the GMB.

**1. Initial Business**

The Chair provided instructions to the membership on GBM meeting etiquette/procedures and technical support available for the conference. A vote on modifications to SAfA bylaws was scheduled for this meeting which would be held once quorum was achieved.

The results of the book prizes were reported by Willeke Wendrich, who reviewed the criteria used in decision making. The award recipients in the three categories were:

- 1) Edited volume, Pan-Africa: *Art rupestre et patrimoine mondial en Afrique subsaharienne*, 2021 by Geoffroy Heimlich;
- 2) Edited volume, specific: *The Swahili World*, 2020 by Stephanie Wynne-Jones and Adria LaViolette;
- 3) Monograph: *Divine Fertility: The Continuity in Transformation of an Ideology of Sacred Kinship in Northeast Africa*, 2020, by Sada Mire.

Special mention of: *Sisulu L'enfant de Lom Pangar*, 2021 by Kelly Ntep, Bienvenu Gouem-Gouem, Vincent Malyk Nomo, Michel Ndoh, in a storybook format.

Congratulations were offered to award recipients and all submissions made this year.

The Student Paper Award was reported to be in progress and results would be announced at a later date. Many thanks were offered to the judges.

The President's Report (Part A) was the next agenda item, but because quorum (131 members) had not yet been achieved, the Chair decided to deviate from the agenda and move to the Organizing Secretary's Report.

**(Please note:** The numbering of agenda items has been retained here, to facilitate reading the minutes and relating them to the agenda.)

### **3. Organizing Secretary Report (Peter Mitchell)**

Peter Mitchell reported on the history and current status of the 25<sup>th</sup> SAfA Biennial Conference. The meeting was originally scheduled for 21-24 Sept. 2020 at Oxford University. The OC was very successful in raising approximately £57,000 (€64,000, \$73,000) in support of the plenary sessions, speakers, and travel awards made before the conference postponement. Many thanks were extended to the donors.

The COVID-19 global pandemic forced the cancellation of the planned in-person conference of 21-14 Sept. 2020. Other options for the conference were considered by the SAfA COVID Matters Committee (CMC) and on 21 April, 2020 the CMC voted in support of delaying an in-person meeting to August 2021. The further worsening of the pandemic led to a vote by the CMC on 8 March 2021 to support the Oxford OC recommendation to move to an entirely online meeting format with dates of August-September 2021.

The re-scheduled conference consisted of 24 research sessions and 218 papers with 4 plenary sessions. The advantages of an online format included greater accessibility for many members with almost no cost to SAfA in the running of the conference.

Thanks were extended to individuals involved in the unprecedented history of the 25<sup>th</sup> Biennial conference: Elisabeth Hildebrand, Susan McIntosh, Matt Curtis, Stephanie Wynne-Jones, Jane Humphris and Robyn Mason.

The Chair thanked the conference Organising Secretary and the OC for their hard work and perseverance in transforming what was to be an in-person conference to an online format in the midst of a global pandemic.

Quorum was still not achieved, and as a result the Chair moved to the Treasurer's update.

### **4. Treasurer's Update (Brian Stewart)**

Brian Stewart congratulated the President for her outstanding leadership in challenging times and to Peter Mitchell and the Oxford OC. Thanks were extended to Susan McIntosh and Rice University for providing a solid platform for SAfA institutional support and printing *Nyame Akuma* for many years. Rice University contributed significantly to making SAfA the successful society it is today.

Over the past several years, SAfA has been transitioning away from the Rice University platform, mainly because our needs have changed, as a result of significant increases in membership. This involved a major re-organization in society infrastructure and personnel. The recent move to the Bank of America provided many advantages, including online banking and debit card services. The SAfA website had fully

migrated from CMS400 to Drupal/Squarespace and most recently to the Wild Apricot platform. Platform moves involved a new bank and diverse methods in tracking revenue streams, including institutional subscriptions to *Nyame Akuma*, society donations, institutional memberships, etc. The printing and distribution of *Nyame Akuma* was moved from Rice University to the University of Michigan which involved a transition in personnel from ex-Treasurer Brian Clark (Rice University) to the current Treasurer Brian Stewart (University of Michigan). Different options for printing *Nyame Akuma* were explored and the University of Michigan Print and Copy Shop provided a low cost printing option. In future the society should explore whether to continue printing *Nyame Akuma* or move to online distribution.

In 90 days Brian Clark and Brian Stewart will organise a presentation and report to the board with a full account summarising infrastructural changes over the past four years. The report will be sent to the next EB and uploaded to the SAfA website.

Overall the pandemic eased the financial burden to SAfA in several ways, including cancellation of the in-person conference and the temporary cessation of *Nyame Akuma* printing. These circumstances, in addition to the excellent fundraising by the Oxford OC, resulted in significant cost reductions to SAfA. These developments coincided with new major expenditures including transferring to the Wild Apricot website, GSuite email accounts and *Nyame Akuma* copyediting. Still, the budget was in good shape: \$42,558.54 was held at Rice University and \$13,595.51 in Bank of America, with a total budget of \$56,155.05. After the upcoming costs of printing *Nyame Akuma* back issues, we expected to have on the order of \$50,000 remaining at the end of the year. Total assets increased on a yearly basis since 2014, despite the pandemic and challenges of infrastructure and personnel transformations. In 2020 alone, SAfA membership increased by 79%. Our total member count was 788, an increase which coincided with the pandemic. Over ½ of SAfA members (45, 58%) were resident in Africa. The overall trajectory of SAfA was moving in a positive direction in terms of finances, memberships and overall health of the organisation.

The Chair extended thanks to Brian Clark and Brian Stewart in their outstanding efforts to modernize SAfA operations.

#### **ACTION ITEMS:**

***In future SAfA should explore whether to continue printing Nyame Akuma or moving to online distribution.***

***In 90 days, Brian Clark and Brian Stewart will report to the EB on the infrastructural and personnel transitions which have taken place during the past three years. The report will be sent to the next EB and a copy uploaded to the SAfA website.***

The Chair decided to move to the Presidents Report Part A, because quorum was close to being achieved.

## **2. President's Report (Part A) (Elisabeth Hildebrand)**

### **A. Pandemic effects on Executive operations**

The President reported that existing bylaws had no provision for conducting elections other than in-person during the GBM held at each conference. It was not possible to follow this bylaw in 2020 because the COVID-19 global pandemic resulted in the cancellation of the Oxford in-person conference. As a result, the terms of current EB members were extended to three years rather than the normal two years. Online elections could not take place during the GBM, but it is possible to vote on bylaw changes that will enable us to hold online elections.

### **B. Findings of *ad hoc* committees formed in 2019 to deal with special issues & society governance**

#### **i) Sexual Harassment and Violence Prevention Committee (SHVPC)**

The SHVPC, chaired by Amanda Logan, was tasked with a review of SAfA's policy on harassment and violence prevention, in light of unfortunate events taking place at other conferences. Committee members included Alemseged Beldados, Catherine D'Andrea, Paul Lane, Nancy Morongwe Mosothwane and four anonymous student members. The SHVPC reviewed the harassment policies of numerous professional organisations and a report will be circulated to the EB and membership. The president thanked committee members for their work on this important initiative.

#### **ACTION ITEM:**

***The SHVPC will report their findings to the EB and membership.***

#### **ii) Leadership Structure Committee (LSC)**

The formation of the LSC was an outcome of the 2018 SAfA GBM. Co-chaired by Elena Garcea and Diane Gifford-Gonzalez and assisted by other members, their task was to gather information on procedures followed in other professional societies and develop revisions to the SAfA leadership structure in order to facilitate the transition between EBs. In past transitions, new EB members were not always certain what was achieved by earlier EBs and the handover of information was not always seamless.

The LSC provided lists of recommended changes to SAfA bylaws, produced an Executive Handbook, and composed a new calendar of working schedule for EBs, all of which would streamline future SAfA operations. The Chair thanked LSC committee members for developing these critical bylaw recommendations.

The recommended changes to bylaws were initially reviewed by the EB. Some proposed changes were adopted as written, others were modified slightly and some were declined. The revised bylaws will be voted upon in two steps. Step 1 recommendations arose out of the immediate

challenges of the pandemic, and of particular importance was the proposal to permit online voting. These recommendations were circulated to the membership 15 June 2021 and will be voted on today. Step 2 recommendations focused on improving the continuity of knowledge during transitions between elected EBs. These proposed changes were circulated on 1 August 2021 and will be voted on at some point in the future. If Step 1 revisions pass today, we will have the option of conducting online voting and could hold an online vote for Step 2.

**ACTION ITEM:**

***Voting on Step 2 recommendations will take place soon assuming the Step 1 revisions are approved at this GBM.***

**C. Proposed Bylaws Revisions: Step 1**

**i) Discussion of Step 1 proposed revisions, circulated 15 June 2021**

The Chair reviewed the five Step 1 proposed revisions, to provide an opportunity for the membership to ask questions and request clarifications. The proposed changes were described for: Article VI, Section 3, Duration of Office; Article VII, Section 3, Term of Office; Article VII Officers, Section 2, Qualification for Officers; and Article VIII Meetings and Voting, Section 4 Voting and Section 5 Quorum of Members. Section 6 was added to Article VIII which described procedures for electronic voting.

In summary, these proposed changes would: enable people not present at the GBM to be elected to the EB in an online vote; permit the extension of EB officer terms in extraordinary circumstances; and involve a one-year transition during which time elected officials can work with existing EB members and learn the demands of the positions prior to taking office. The LSC canvassed several societies and determined that quorum is unnecessary in electronic voting because the online system permits large numbers of members to vote, rendering quorum unnecessary. Even if voting took place in-person meetings at the GBM, online balloting would be permitted. All EB candidates would be asked to submit a statement of interest to be published online prior to voting. The addition of Section 6 to Article VIII sets deadlines for: opening dates for any electronic voting (30 days notice); submission of candidate statements of interest and informational packages (7 days notice); electronic voting period (14 days); and setting dates for sending voting reminders to the membership.

The Chair responded to questions from members in attendance throughout the presentation.

Two amendments were proposed by members in attendance: 1) the voting notification of 30 days was changed to 45 days based on 64 positive votes (above the 2/3 majority required); 2) the number of days of voting was increased from 14 to 20 days, based on 74 positive votes (above the 50% majority required).

Finally, the proposed revisions to Article XIV, Amendments, Section 2, permitted online voting for amendments (67% majority required).

## **ii) Live vote on Step 1 proposed revisions**

Quorum was achieved and the Chair put forward the agenda item: to conduct a live vote on Step 1 proposed revisions. Moved by Scott MacEachern, seconded by Kristina Douglass.

121 votes in favour and 0 against (over 67% positive votes).

Motion carried.

## **5. Webmasters' Report (Susan McIntosh & Matt Curtis)**

Susan McIntosh presented an overview of the SAfA website transitions starting in 2018 with [safa.rice.edu](http://safa.rice.edu) and in 2019 when Rice University changed content-management platforms. The new website launched in 2019 was found to have limited functions. At that time there was a new requirement for websites at Rice University to have all content accessible to the visually impaired (all graphics would require a verbal description) and it was not feasible to apply this to *Nyame Akuma*. It was decided to create a new webpage that would link to [safa.rice.edu](http://safa.rice.edu), created by Matt Curtis. The goal in 2020 was to create a new website that incorporated all SAfA functions, including the listserve, *Nyame Akuma*, conferences, etc. SAfA hired web designer Scott Bjelland to find a platform that could include all necessary functions. The new website, [safarchaeology.org](http://safarchaeology.org), launched in October 2020 and included all SAfA functions. The Rice University list serve will be retired on 9 September 2021 and currently both listserves in use until that time. Many thanks were expressed to Matt Curtis, Susan McIntosh and Rice University IT personnel who oversaw these transitions at no cost to SAfA. The Chair extended her thanks to Susan McIntosh for her innumerable contributions made over many years of dedicated service to oversee the SAfA website.

Matt Curtis presented an overview of features in the new website, including a special archive page on *Nyame Akuma* volumes, which were accessible to anyone, and access to archives of the *Prehistoric Society of Zimbabwe Newsletters* (2007-2013) and the *West African Archaeological Newsletter* (1964-1970). A newly established SAfA Discussion Forum was open and it will be possible to create new discussion topics and group fora as new platforms for discussions and sharing information. The Links section of the new website can be linked to research projects or other professional associations of interest. Members were encouraged to provide input to develop new features on the SAfA website.

## **6. Nyame Akuma Editors' Report (Els Cornelissen & Liza Gijanto)**

Els Cornelissen presented a summary of articles submitted to *Nyame Akuma*. The newsletter included an average of seven papers per volume, with a strong focus on the Holocene of East and West Africa. Starting with Volume 95-100, an MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) was established between SAfA and the Royal Museum of Central Africa (RMCA) to facilitate the transfer of the journal to the RMCA. Author guidelines were employed from Volume 85 onward and were under revision, including a checklist. Many thanks were extended to Rice University, SAfA Treasurers (Brian Clark and Brian Stewart) and Webmasters (Susan McIntosh and Matt Curtis) for the new online publishing options. There was a plan to establish a board of Associate Editors to enhance transparency, ensure timely

publication, and offer writing support, if needed. The aim was to publish 10 papers per volume, emphasising the results of fieldwork. New submission deadlines were set at 15 September and 15 March.

The Chair thanked the editors of *Nyame Akuma* for the work completed to date, especially their efforts to raise the profile of the newsletter.

The membership noted potential problems with the new submission deadline dates which would conflict with summer fieldwork seasons. The Chair tabled the discussion and editors in consultation with the EB and the membership could decide on a strategy to meet the needs of authors, editors, and publishers.

#### **ACTION ITEMS:**

***Nyame Akuma* editors, in consultation with the EB and general membership, will reconsider submission deadlines in light of needs of authors, editors and publishers.**

### **7. Africanist Journals Reports (Elisabeth Hildebrand)**

Journal editors of *African Archaeological Review* (Akin Ogundiran), *Journal of African Archaeology* (Katherine Grillo) and *Azania* (Kevin MacDonald, Peter Mitchell, Pete Robertshaw) provided no new updates to the membership.

#### **A. Announcement of Virtual Tables to be hosted by journal editors**

Peter Mitchell presented the schedule for virtual tables which would enable members to meet editors of *Journal of African Archaeology*, *African Archaeological Review* and *Azania*. If these times were not convenient, members were requested to contact the respective editors to make alternate arrangements. Matt Curtis demonstrated how virtual tables work and how to join.

### **8. Report from student representatives (Mncendisi Siteleki, Sol Sanchez Dehesa-Galan, Tomos Evans)**

Tomos Evans reported that two student sessions are planned for 31 August: a forum on publishing and decolonising African archaeology. He encouraged students to attend the planned virtual events and additional details will be included in an email to the membership. Student elections were underway and would follow the same new format used by the society.

The Chair thanked student representatives for their work in SAfA and especially in their assistance in making decisions relating to the pandemic.

#### **ACTION ITEM:**

*Student representatives will send an email to membership providing more detail on on-line events.*

## **9. President's Report Part B (Elisabeth Hildebrand)**

The President indicated that all voting scheduled for the GBM was complete. She presented a summary of proposed bylaw changes planned for Step 2 to provide the membership with an opportunity to offer feedback. Step 2 proposed changes would be voted on at a later date.

### **A. Discussion of Proposed Step 2 Bylaws changes**

On 1 August 2020, the President circulated to the membership a document summarising Step 2 of proposed bylaw changes. The objectives of the proposed changes were: to improve transitions between EBs; lighten the workload of the EB; engage more members to participate in governance through the creation of a Nominations and Elections Committee (NEC); ensure elections were effectively run by dedicated staff; and make SAfA positions more broadly distributed across the membership.

A summary of the recommended changes was provided with a request for input from the membership. The main bylaw changes included: new officer-elect positions on the EB (see Article VI Section 2; Article 7 Section 3b and Section 6); recommendation that multiple terms be considered for a few key roles, namely, Treasurer and Recording Secretary who should give notice before retiring to facilitate the transition to the new office (see Article VI Section 3c,d; Article VI, Section 3b); and the creation of an NEC.

Holders of the newly formed office-elect positions would transfer to their respective EB positions without another vote. This means that the total service period of EB members would be three years instead of two. The creation of an NEC would standardize the selection of new EB members and prevent last-minute nominations on unfilled positions. The NEC membership would be comprised of 3-5 persons, who were not active members of the EB. Specific requirements of Nominations Committee members were reviewed and a requirement to circulate a Call for Nominations was described (see Article X Section 2a).

A new classification scheme of SAfA committees was outlined: Standing, Ad Hoc, and Service Committees (see Article X). The terms of reference for these committees would be provided at a later date.

Several proposed changes to SAfA dues structure were described, including increasing the 50% discount to students and the creation of a new membership category of Recent Degree Members who would be eligible for reduced dues (see Article IV Sections 2-6). The free membership offered to African membership would continue.

Proposed bylaw changes to strengthen the language of conduct within our society were outlined, so that bylaws made more explicit references to SAfA Ethics codes and Sexual Harassment policy (see Article IV Section 13a).

The schedule of tasks and voting arising from the proposed Step 2 bylaw changes were outlined as follows:

Oct 1-15 2021: earliest legal interval for 2-week online vote on Step 1;

15-30 Oct 2021: appointment of NEC and call for candidates;

November 2021: finalise electoral slates, begin 2-week online election;

December 2021: online election closes, results announced. Handover to new EC;

Spring 2022: nomination and election of officers-elect who would assume official positions in 2023-2025.

#### **ACTION ITEMS:**

***A vote on Step 2 changes to the bylaws would be held later this year.***

***The terms of reference for Standing, Ad Hoc, and Service Committees would be provided at a later date.***

### **B. Reports from other committees in various stages of development (Elisabeth Hildebrand)**

#### **i) Committee to prevent threats to archaeological heritage**

The Pan African Archaeological Association for Prehistory and Related Studies (PANAFA) and SAfA had agreed to create a unified committee to consider how to prevent threats to African archaeological heritage. The joint committee will be seated in PANAFA.

#### **ii) Establishment of a radiocarbon dating fund committee**

This committee was chaired by Phillip de Barros and included more than 10 individuals. The purpose was to establish a fund for radiocarbon dating available to African and emerging scholars. The committee were developing the committee terms of reference and deciding whether or not it should be associated with SAfA and/or PANAFA. The Chair thanked Phillip de Barros and members who have assisted in this committee.

#### **iii) COVID Matters Committee: highlights from the results of the CMC survey**

The CMC was created to assist in SAfA decision-making during the pandemic. It was jointly chaired by Paul Lane and Catherine D'Andrea and the members included Alemseged Beldados, Timothy Clack, Brian Clark, Munyaradzi Manyanga and Brian Stewart. One half of the members were taken from the EB and half from the Oxford conference OC.

The CMC conducted a survey in 20 May-20 July 2021 to explore perceived benefits and challenges facing SAfA conferences if they were to adopt an online format. The CMC received responses from the diverse SAfA membership across the society. The documents will be posted online and the

membership was encouraged to review the results. The CMC thanked all members who participated in the survey.

The survey requested responses to three basic questions: which conference features were of most importance to SAfA members; which conference events retained their value online; and how perceptions relating to conference format varied across our diverse membership. The President described how the survey results were quantified and presented the data in bar graphs.

The survey provided new data on which meeting events were of most importance to SAfA members at different career stages. Limitations of the data were reviewed. The membership response rate was moderate: about 25% of members participated. This was perhaps not a mandate but a good snapshot of the views of SAfA members.

Respondents were enthusiastic about having an online conference format but others stated that the meetings should not be entirely online. An online format would significantly reduce travel and associated costs to attend an in-person conference, however some argued that this option would not work well for members who lacked access to reliable internet. Suggestions were made to consider developing a hybrid structure for SAfA conferences, including both in-person and online events. Plenary sessions and conference sessions tackling large issues or methods would work well online. Peer networking would be more difficult to conduct in an online format, so SAfA should consider ways to support conference networking for those who cannot travel. In particular, the Student Day sessions would probably not work well in an online format.

There was value in preserving some in-person activities but this would pose a challenge for organisers of hybrid meetings: how to facilitate peer networking for members who cannot travel.

The results of the survey will be made available to the next EB to assist in planning future conferences. A pdf file of survey data will be available on the SAfA website. Additional surveys should be conducted in future to reflect new conditions. The President thanked the members of the CMC for their work and assistance in decision making during the unpredictable and volatile conditions of the pandemic.

#### **ACTION ITEMS:**

***The results of the survey conducted by the CMC on issues surrounding online presentation of future conferences will be posted online.***

***The results of the CMC survey will be made available to the next EB.***

***A pdf file of the survey data will be available to members on the SAfA website.***

#### **C. Schedule for upcoming Society Business**

Nothing to report.

## **10. Necrology (Elisabeth Hildebrand)**

The Chair acknowledged our colleagues who have passed away since the last BGM. In that time, we have lost: Prof. Abdelgadir Mahmoud Abdulla (Sudan), Dr. Fabian Sylvester Kigadye (Tanzania), Mr. Pena Tlamelo Monageng (Botswana), Dr. Barbara Eichhorn (Germany), Prof. Charles M. Keller (USA), Mr. Hailu Zeleke (Ethiopia), Dr. Émilie Campmas (France), Prof. Barthélémy Gilbert Manjakahery (Madagascar), and Mr. Zafy Maharesy Dieu Donn   Christooome (Madagascar). A moment of silence was observed for each slide permitting the membership to read their accomplishments. Our condolences to their families, friends, and colleagues.

No additional obituary notices were offered by the membership.

## **11. Announcements from the membership**

There were no announcements from the membership in attendance.

## **12. Closing Remarks (Elisabeth Hildebrand)**

The chair thanked SAfA members for attending the GBM. She expressed gratitude to Peter Mitchell and the Oxford OC who had to plan for several iterations of the conference in the fluid environment of the global pandemic. The chair extended thanks to Susan McIntosh and Matt Curtis for their superb work over the years, much of it behind the scenes. EB members were thanked for their work beyond the normal two-year terms. Peter Mitchell thanked the President for the many contributions achieved during her extended three-year term under extraordinary circumstances, including the completion of complex and much needed constitutional changes. He commended that chair for her many contributions which revealed her dedication to SAfA as an institution and the practice of African archaeology.

Peter Mitchell and Matt Curtis reminded members of upcoming conference events scheduled in the weeks following the GBM.

Meeting was adjourned at 18:29 UTC.