

## BOOK REVIEW

*Lost World of the Golden King: In Search of Ancient Afghanistan.* By FRANK L. HOLT. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012. Pp. xxi + 343. Hardcover, \$39.95. ISBN 978-0-520-27342-9.

This book is the latest in a series by Frank L. Holt in which he has explored the history—and, more specifically, the numismatic history—of Bactria, ancient Afghanistan. In it, he casts the story of scholarly inquiry into Hellenistic Bactria as an adventure story, culminating in the intrigues of the antiquities market in recent years. Above all, however, this is a history of a field, and of the changes in intellectual approaches which have been brought to bear on Bactrian numismatics.

This history is followed through a series of stages (“checklist numismatics,” “framework numismatics,” “novelty numismatics,” “narrative numismatics,” “rescue and revisionist numismatics,” “cognitive numismatics”), with additional chapters on archaeology and epigraphy. It moves from the earliest European collections of and studies on Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek coins in the eighteenth century, through nineteenth-century advances in understanding (and fraught international relations) to the present day, with incisive critique and careful explanation of the scholarly assumptions underlying analysis of ancient source material (historical texts, coins, archaeology and inscriptions) and the paradigm shifts by which Bactrian studies have advanced. As well as the history of coin collecting and coin study, a chapter on archaeology discusses the city of Ai Khanoum and other sites, such as Tillya Tepe and Balkh. A further chapter on epigraphy reviews the evidence from both stone inscriptions, including such recent discoveries as the Sophytos inscription from Kandahar and the Heliodotos inscription from Kuliab, and documentary texts. The sense of methodological development (both progress and regress) in the field of Bactrian studies is clearly signposted throughout, and nicely encapsulated in summary form in the conclusion.

Bactrian studies have suffered in the past from romanticization, and the almost desperate attempt to find points of certainty and historical precision in a fragmentary corpus of evidence, one which, furthermore, is constantly being

augmented. Holt's work provides a critical review of the evidence, and some welcome debunking of past theories and intellectual trends. The appropriately skeptical discussion of attempts to read a king's personality into his portraits on his coinage is an excellent case in point (80–7). Holt likewise picks apart scholarly assumptions about relationships between kings, and how these end up being wound into a narrative as fact. This makes the present work very useful for reading older ones. Anyone coming new to things Bactrian, and with historiographical interests, should read this book before the older "standard works" such as W. W. Tarn's *The Greeks in Bactria and India* (1938) and A. K. Narain's *The Indo-Greeks* (1957).

A few points of critique. The rhyming translations of Greek inscriptions read well, but make it difficult to extract points of detail from the text—especially since the original Greek is not given. No reference is given for the new Heliodotos coin from Kashmir (p. 125). This should be O. Bopearachchi, "Deux documents exceptionnels en numismatique indo-grecque," *Cahiers Numismatiques* 48.189 (September 2011) 3–6. Further discussion of questions of authenticity would also have been welcome—if I were going to fake a coin of a "new" Graeco-Bactrian/Indo-Greek king, Heliodotos is just the name I would choose, given its presence in a recently published inscription. In all, however, Holt's work is to be thoroughly recommended, to students of the field, interested readers in other fields, and a more general readership.

The book is well produced and attractively laid out. The maps are useful, as are the color plates (especially the photograph of a tetradrachm die, possibly from Ai Khanoum), although some of the line drawing illustrations might have been replaced with images of the portraits and photographs from which they were taken. The alphabetic listing of publications by same author in bibliography, by title rather than date, can make it difficult to follow up references. The bibliography is very up-to-date, and includes recent reports of archaeological fieldwork.

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