

BOOK REVIEW

Afghanistan: Forging Civilizations along the Silk Road. Edited BY JOAN ARUZ and ELISABETTA VALTZ FINO. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012. Pp. 142. Paperback, \$35.00. ISBN 978-0-300-17954-5.

It is a fortunate event when a museum exhibit is so successful that it takes on a life of its own with a symposium and papers published after the event. The National Geographic Society's exhibition on Afghanistan has now been followed by this well-illustrated collection of eleven essays, with an extensive bibliography, timeline and map, featuring detailed research on particular pieces that were in the travelling Afghanistan show in 2008–2009. This is an excellent supplement to the catalogue of the exhibit, which sought to present the material culture, most of it burial goods and gold, revealing the history of a region we now associate primarily with war and destruction. As Joan Aruz relates in the introduction, the exhibit represents a kind of triumph, thanks to the heroic efforts of the staff of the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul, who managed to preserve a good portion of the valuable items in the collection despite destruction and looting. The first chapter, by Omara Khan Massoudi, provides a substantial history of the museum from its founding in 1924 to the beginnings of a proper inventory of the collections in 2003. The overall success of this exhibit signals the survival of the fragile cultural heritage of a modern Afghanistan.

Subsequent chapters examine the multi-layered history of ancient Afghanistan. In "The Bronze Age World of Afghanistan," Frederick T. Hiebert discusses how the landscape shaped the region's socio-political relations and material culture. With archaeological items, he surveys the prehistoric period, describing how Raphael Pumpelly was the first scholar to explore this region, identifying it as a gold mine with its own distinctive pottery and evidence for extensive relationships with other cultures.

For the Hellenistic period, the most ample finds in this region were hoards of coins, described by Frank H. Holt, as "traveling disks, recording names, royal titles, honorific epithets, family portraiture, the insignia of power, and the images and the attributes of patron deities ... encoded with messages." (31) Major coins

of interest from this chapter are the gold staters of Diodorus II, the founder of the Bactrian kingdom.

Paul Bernard focuses on the excavations of Ai Khanoum ("Moon Lady"), a Greek colony situated on the edge of Asia; a striking example of how crosscurrents of culture between the east and west can be illustrated through archaeological finds. Most interesting are reconstructions of the city, its theatre and palace, but perhaps the best archaeological remains are its Corinthian columns and a winged antefix. One of the most fascinating finds is the left foot of a cult statue, featuring elegant toenails and a sandal strap with luxuriant lotus blossoms and foliated sprouts. The sheer size of these pieces and the proportions of these sculptures attest to the highly sophisticated skill of the ancient artisans.

David Whitehouse's essay on glass objects from Begram provides the reader with an excellent survey of these fragile items. Many of the pieces have a distinctly Roman appearance, especially a footed rhyton (fig. 4), but probably the most historically important piece is a beaker depicting the lighthouse of Alexandria, surmounted by a figure of a club-wielding Herakles. In striking contrast to Begram's Greek-inspired art is Sanjyt Mehendale's discussion of a group of ivory carvings in a distinctively Indian style. Mehendale also adduces a female figurine identified as Lakshmi, which was found in Pompeii, and makes a cogent argument for its origin and how it arrived in the Roman city.

The remaining essays deal with pieces found at Tillya Tepe, another important archaeological site, whose name means "Hill of Gold." Jane Hickman deals with the gold metallurgy industry; she explains how Bactria was crossed by "trade routes associated with the Silk Road, providing it access to raw materials as well as stylistic influences from a range of cultures." (78). The finds from this site are an extravagant variety, including bracelets, necklaces, hair pins, and shoulder ornaments, with inlaid stones and abstract decorative elements featuring interlocking animals, crescent moons and appliqués.

In the next chapter, Henri-Paul Francfort examines Tillya Tepe's connections with the nomadic art of the Eurasian steppes, including the spectacular Dragon Master pendant. John Boardman explores Tillya Tepe's "Echoes of Greece and China," emphasizing the importance of the region as a cultural crossroads; and Denise Patry Leidy raises a number of questions about the Chinese-inspired goods found in this Greco-Roman outpost, whose art combines motifs from both Greco-Roman and Chinese art.

This collection of essays sheds valuable light on an under-documented subject (especially in English; most of the literature on these sites is in French). It is

high time that scholarly attention has been drawn to the ancient outpost of Bactria, at the intersection of many cultures along the Silk Road. Overall the essays in this collection are successful in promoting interest in a part of the world known mainly from news of the current conflict. While this symposium investigates some esoteric areas of art history, it is always careful to return to the theme of crosscurrents of culture. This volume will no doubt be suitable for a wide cross-section of people; scholars, students and enthusiasts will find it readily accessible.

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