

and the trade and working in silk in the eastern Roman empire down to the 4th century AD. T.K. Thomas takes the story of decorated textiles down through the first four centuries AD, notably in Syria and Egypt, and their use for Christian motifs

L.L. Tseng presents splendid colour pictures of figure-decorated and inscribed silks from Niya in the Taklamakan Desert. The animal figures look to me strikingly like motifs on belt plaques found in China (the 'Ordos Bronzes') and north of the Tianshan range. The inscription reads 'The conjunction of the five planets in the east would benefit the Middle Kingdom' and leads to discussion of Chinese views of the world system.

Z. Feng presents various types of silk identified in finds from excavation at Yingpan (east Taklamakan Desert) and the phenomenon of silks being unravelled for reuse. A. Sheng explores weaving technologies in Asia and the weaving of double-cloth on upright looms in the early years AD.

The book ends with an appreciation of the career of the Harvard scholar Irene Lee Good (died 2013), and her contribution to silk studies.

There is much here to engage the expert but we might hope that others may also learn more about a subject which was far more conspicuous in antiquity than most that occupy archaeologists, and therefore perhaps a more valuable guide to our understanding of people, places and motives

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F.L. Holt, *The Treasures of Alexander: How One Man's Wealth Shaped the World*, Onassis Series in Hellenic Culture, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016, xvii+295pp., illustrations. Cased. ISBN 978-0-19-995096-6

Amid the seemingly endless proliferation of general biographies of Alexander the Great, it has become increasingly necessary for ancient historians to search creatively for different angles from which to approach the conqueror's life in the hope of shedding some new light on this perennial figure of fascination. This has led to a variety of monographs ranging from John D. Grainger's consideration of the Achaemenid *longue-durée* in *Alexander the Great Failure: The Collapse of the Macedonian Empire* (London 2007) and John O'Brien's fascinating examination of Alexander's alcoholism in *Alexander the Great: The Invisible Enemy* (London 1992) to Daniel Ogden's mythic focus in 2011.¹ Frank Holt has already contributed to this oblique approach with his previous works on the background to Alexander's Elephant Medallions as well as his campaigns in Afghanistan,² and he has now made another noteworthy, if not entirely unproblematic, contribution with the publication of *The Treasures of Alexander the Great*.

The book is, it seems, intended for a general audience, but H. nonetheless situates himself explicitly within two longer scholarly debates on Alexander. First, he seeks to argue against the enduring view of Plutarch, Droysen and their adherents that the campaigns of Alexander resulted in the monetisation and circulation of vast quantities of Achaemenid

¹ *Alexander the Great: Myth, Genesis and Sexuality* (Exeter 2011).

² *Alexander the Great and the Mystery of the Elephant Medallions* (Berkeley 2003); *In the Land of Bones: Alexander the Great in Afghanistan* (Berkeley 2005).

precious metals; and second, he aims to add the economic experience of those serving under and conquered by Alexander into the ongoing ‘good Alexander versus bad Alexander’ debate. These aims are made explicit in the Introduction (pp. 1–22), after which he argues against the ancient and modern supposition that Alexander inherited a bankrupt and financially exhausted Macedonian kingdom (pp. 23–43). This is followed by an interesting chapter (pp. 44–67) on the role of loot and plunder in Alexander’s finances, which examines the territories and peoples that were dispossessed of not only precious metals, but also slaves, livestock and other perishable goods by the king and his army, and concludes, unsurprisingly, that these privations came to the great detriment of the conquered. From here H. turns to what he describes as the Fort Knox of antiquity – the wealth of the Achaemenid kings – and how this was taken by Alexander, before considering what Alexander’s expenditures reveal about his personal and strategic priorities in a chapter that is fascinating, but all too brief (pp. 95–118). Ending as he began, H. then argues that Alexander was no poorer at the time of his death in 323 BC than he was at his accession to the throne in 336, but balances this with the conclusion that many of Alexander’s soldiers found themselves increasingly in debt as the campaigns wore on. Finally, his conclusion then adds Alexander’s wealth into the equation when calculating the morality of the conqueror and his legacy, arriving at the observation that any economic benefit that came of Alexander’s campaigns was the (perhaps unintentional) ‘byproduct of an otherwise destructive process’ (p. 176). Alexander was, ultimately, a soldier, not an economist.

There is certainly much to like in H.’s book, but also some cause for unease. The economic perspective on the king and his conquered territories is eminently refreshing, as is H.’s consideration of the unintentional and indirect consequences of Alexander’s campaign. Not everything that happened during his reign, it is made clear, was guided by the hand of the king – an observation that ought to be borne in mind more frequently. The logistics of transporting and storing such monumental quantities of plunder likewise adds an entirely new dimension to the strategic picture. But H. is at times too preoccupied with the morality of Alexander’s wealth and plunder, when other topics could have been equally illuminating had they been explored more fully: Alexander overwhelmingly spent his treasure on gifts, benefactions and religious dedications, yet these are considered all too briefly (pp. 96–109); likewise, the economics of Alexander’s city foundations are relegated to a few pages (pp. 110–12), but this engineering programme had such a profound impact on the physical and economic landscape of the conquered territories. Although H. is quick to point out that precious metals were certainly not the only form of wealth or plunder in the fourth century, he often becomes bogged down in calculating sums of precious metal and currency as something of an exercise in mathematics, while the unreliability of the ancient figures brings into question the utility of such numbers. Nonetheless, H.’s identification of two distinct economic phases (p. 94) of Alexander’s conquest – the first from 336 to 330 BC when the invaders absorb the urban wealth of Asia and the second from 329 to 323 BC when Alexander’s army plunders the perishable goods of less urbanised peoples and regions – has a great deal of import beyond just our financial understanding of his reign.

As is always the case with such works geared towards a general readership, there are sources of frustration to the specialist reader. Hyperbole abounds, beginning with H.’s opening statement (p. 1) that nobody else in history conquered as much wealth and land in such a short time as Alexander – a claim that is substantiated only with a footnote which

states that Genghis Khan lived twice as long as the Macedonian (p. 199). The various figures and graphs scattered throughout the work perhaps seem more authoritative than they are, and despite highlighting quite pressing problems with the reliability of numbers provided by the ancients, H. uses many figures without comment. Why, for instance, should we automatically accept, as on page 70, Curtius' claim (3. 1. 20) that Alexander sent 1100 talents from Gordion to Macedonia or seized 2600 talents from Damascus (3. 13. 6), when other ancient sums are scrutinised and revised? Underlying H.'s approach to Alexander's wealth is a very modern economic sensibility, which presumes that the ancients share the contemporary emphasis on growth as being indicative of economic health, and an implicitly desirable aim in and of itself. Perhaps the ancient perspective as elucidated by Alan Samuel in his monograph *From Athens to Alexandria: Hellenism and Social Goals in Ptolemaic Egypt* (Leuven 1983) would have caused many financial aspects of Alexander's reign to be viewed quite differently. Yet precisely because his book elicits such discussion is testament to its success. H. compels the reader to think about the campaigns of Alexander from a new and generally under-explored angle, and this, in and of itself, is a great accomplishment.

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S. Hoss and A. Whitmore (eds.), *Small Finds and Ancient Social Practices in the Northwest Provinces of the Roman Empire*, Oxbow Books, Oxford/Philadelphia 2016, 173 pp., illustrations. Paperback. ISBN 978-1-78570-256-3

This edited volume is an excellent illustration of the richness and diversity of current research into Roman small finds and material culture. While covering a very wide range of material and employing an array of different approaches, the volume's authors are united in a desire to consider ancient practice, be that about how socks were worn or what types of deities were depicted in bronze. Most of the papers originated from a session at the Roman Archaeology Conference held at the University of Reading in 2014, with a few additional contributions solicited from small finds specialists. Contributors come from the USA, Britain and Germany.

A short Introduction by the editors reviews recent theoretical work, and sets out a framework centred upon social identities, practice and activities and the consideration of artefact deposition and site formation processes. The volume is then divided into three parts: 'Small Finds, the Body and Identity', 'Religion and ritual in the Roman north-western provinces' and 'Artefacts, behaviours and spaces'.

The first section contains two papers concerned with ancient footwear: B. Burandt summarises existing work on Roman hobnail patterns and argues that these have a systematic relationship to types of shoes. In this way even examples where only the sole remains can be identified to shoe type and deductions about intended function can be made. In a paper that expertly combines the textile and iconographic evidence, B. Köstner identifies a specific type of sock with split toes, designed to be worn in *soleae* (thong sandals) by men, women and children in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD. There are also some interesting suggestions as to the actual production technique (*nålbinding*, or single-needle-knitting). Hoss questions previous assumptions about disc brooches being associated mainly with